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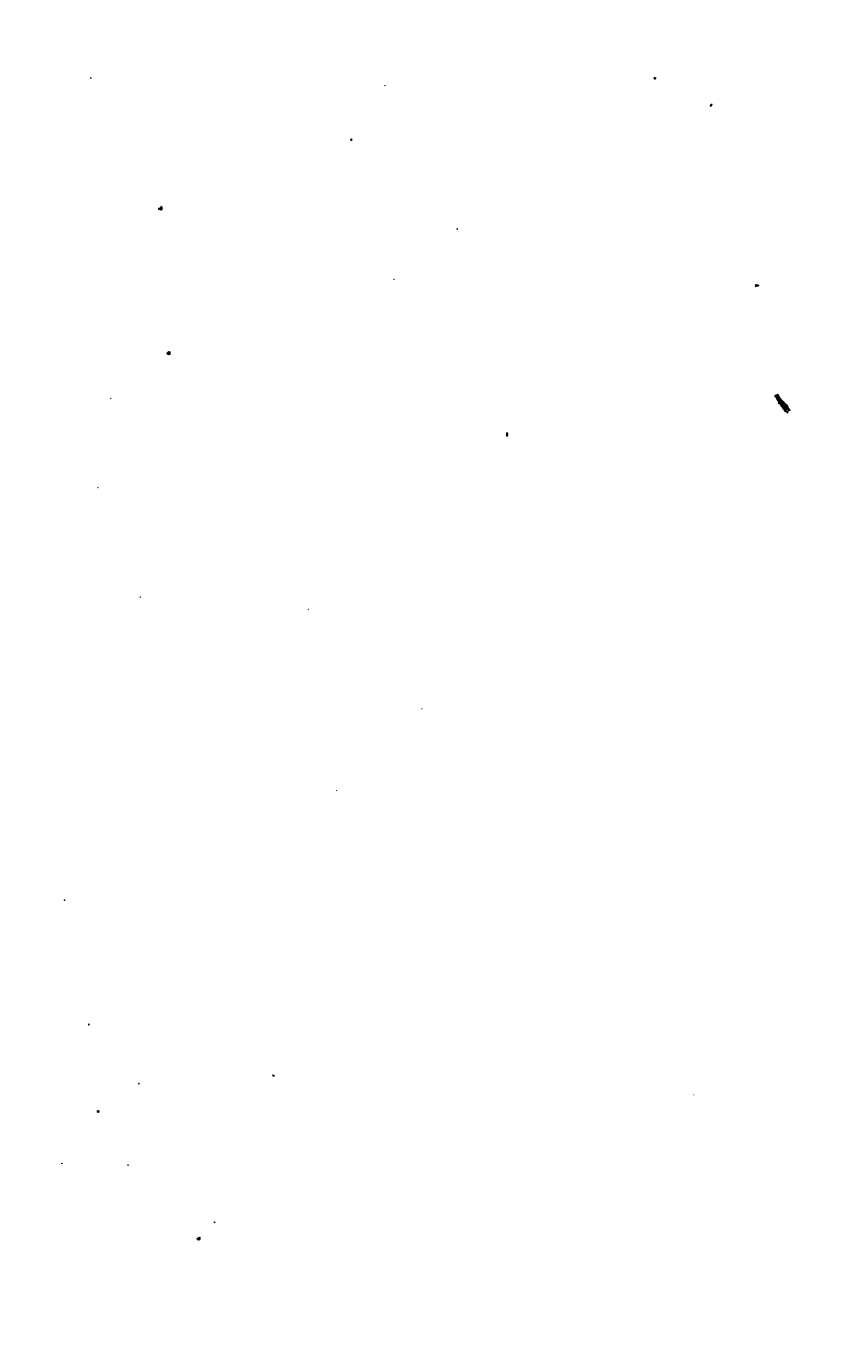
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THE PRICE SHE PAID.

A NOVEL.

BY

FRANK LEE BENEDICT,

AUTHOR OF "SAINT SIMON'S NIECE," "MADAME," ETC., ETC.

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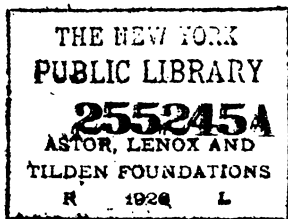
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Dedication.

TO

HENRY TESTARD, Esq.,

WITH MORE GOOD WISHES THAN WOULD FILL
THIS VOLUME.

FRANK LEE BENEDICT.

June, 1882.

THE PRICE SHE PAID.

CHAPTER I.

It was only the first week in May, but the weather had suddenly turned so hot that Miss Grosvenor found New York insupportable, and longed sorely for the freshness and freedom of the country.

Aunt Conyngham wished her to go to their Newport cottage under the housekeeper's charge, promising to follow in a short time, but Miss Grosvenor declined the proposal. Newport was not the country; besides, she did not want sea-air, it would only make her more restless and excited; she was pining for the mountains, and knew that she should gain strength as soon as she got among them, and never until then.

Her relative humored the young lady's caprices, for Georgia was far from well. She had broken down just at the close of the season, had caught a severe cold, which ended in a nervous fever, and had been very poorly ever since. She could neither eat nor sleep, she had lost flesh and spirits, and man interested her not, nor woman either.

"I am going to bits like an ill-made bundle, and those foolish doctors can't find the sort of string that would fasten me together again," she told her aunt in her whimsical fashion.

Said physicians had decided that nothing serious was the matter; her nerves were out of order; but Miss Grosvenor declared that doctors always fell back on this verdict when they did not know what ailed a patient, adding irreverently that seven times out of ten they did not know, and were unable to do any good if by chance they discovered.

She wanted "building up," change of air and complete re-

pose; above all things, she was not to be thwarted or contradicted. Had Georgia heard this portion of the Esculapian dictum, she might have regarded her advisers with less scorn, but Aunt Conyngham wisely kept it to herself, though it rendered her so yielding that her niece could not recover from her astonishment.

It chanced that Mrs. Conyngham's lawyer called at the house on the very day when the ladies were debating the Newport plan, and he was able to suggest a retreat which seemed to Miss Grosvenor exactly what she desired and had despaired of finding,—a farm-house among the mountains of Pennsylvania. The lawyer knew nothing personally about the spot or its owner, but an old friend of his, a clergyman, who resided in a town a few miles distant from the farm, had informed him that his client would find herself perfectly comfortable in case Miss French consented, as the reverend gentleman thought she might, to receive a guest for the summer.

Georgia wrote at once, mentioning the clergyman's name, so that through his medium Miss French could obtain information from the lawyer concerning her applicant, if she considered it necessary. Within two days there came an answer, addressed to "Miss G. G., care of Mrs. Conyngham." Georgia perceived that she must have put only her initials to her own epistle, and was a little mortified that she had been forgetful enough to carry so far a foolish habit she had of employing them when writing to her friends or speaking of herself.

However, the response was favorable, and the chirography so prettily quaint that Miss Grosvenor decided that P. French, as the writer signed her letter, would prove a "character;" and anything out of the beaten track, whether as regarded nature or human beings, was always interesting.

"This is Saturday," said Miss Grosvenor. "I shall telegraph P. French that she may expect me on Tuesday; I can't write again. I am curious to see her; a lady evidently,—the letter shows it,—but not on the stereotyped plan. A spinster, I'll wager—hum! Perhaps she's a female clergyman, or does one say clergywoman? There's a theological look about that P., but, on the other hand, the F. has a vagrant air! And the double stroke under,—the first is coquettish, and the second as black and straight as justice. P. French, whoever

you may be, you are my fate for the next few months, and I am yours."

Aunt Conyngham trusted that by July Georgia would have recovered health and spirits for Newport, and her niece did not disturb the satisfactory belief, though she mentally registered a vow against visiting that or any other crowded resort during the summer. She would not hear of one of the servants accompanying her; she did not want a maid, and it was absurd that she should require protection on a journey of only half a day.

So, on the ensuing Tuesday, Miss Grosvenor left the heat and dust of the town behind at an early hour, and, having traversed the monotonous plains of New Jersey, began the picturesque ascent of the Lehigh Valley Road. Owing to some delay at a junction, it was late in the afternoon when she reached her destination. She descended upon the platform and waited: as she was the only woman who had got off the train, it would not be difficult for P. French or her deputy to recognize her.

After a few instants' delay the express whirled round one of the dizzying curves in which the route is so prolific, and disappeared. A moment later Miss Grosvenor heard the sound of wheels, and from behind the station-buildings came a little open carriage, drawn by a very wicked-looking fat pony; whom the driver—a girl so pretty that Georgia involuntarily uttered an exclamation—brought up to the end of the platform in capital style.

The charioteer sprang out, consigned her steed to the care of a porter, and walked towards Miss Grosvenor.

"You are the only petticoat here, except Indian Joe there in his blanket, and he isn't an Indian either, the old humbug, so I am sure you are my prey," said she.

"And I am sure you can't be P. French!" replied Miss Grosvenor, unable to conceal her surprise.

"And why not, pray?" asked the new-comer, laughing till she showed teeth as white as milk and brought a whole swarm of dimples about her mouth. "I am, though! P. French—very much at your service! Landlady, boarding-house keeper—whatever you please to call me that will signify I am the person who has agreed to take you in, and do you to any extent."

"I am certain it will be accomplished in a delightful fashion," said Miss Grosvenor, laughing too.

"Pretty well for that," replied the other complacently, and then they shook hands. "Is that your baggage? Jim Hodgkins shall take it up in his wagon. Jim, Jim! attend to those trunks, like a good soul, and don't go to sleep on the road, and carry them over to Wachuset." Then to her guest, "We needn't wait: the train is so much behind time that you must be half starved. But what shall I call you, please? or don't you want to be called? For, do you know, your letter was only signed G. G., and the name on the telegram we couldn't make out."

"Good gracious!" said Georgia.

But, before she could add more, her questioner was rattling on,—

"G. ! G. ! Why, it is more aggravating than P. French. I half made up my mind to be impertinent, and ask whether I should say Miss Geegy or Miss Giggy, only I reflected that you might take offence, and refuse to enter my den,—and what a swindle for me, because you must pay for the new bay-window, else I shall have to go to jail, or, what is worse, the poor-house! So tell me how to address, and I'll be yours respectfully in a style to astonish my nearest relations. I've got none except grandma, unless I count old Doctor,—that's my gray cat! Oh, I ought to have mentioned in my letter—it's rather late, but I'd better warn you—if you don't like cats, don't come. I've six,—and three of them have kittens,—two dogs, and my pet pigeon *will* fly into the dining-room every chance she gets! There, while I breathe a little, you can answer as many of those questions as you think fit."

"My name is Georgia Grosvenor. I like cats and dogs, but I'll kill your pigeon the first time it troubles me. I'm the worst-tempered woman in America, and I never pay my bills. I'm in hiding now from my creditors, and that heaviest box of mine, which Jim Hodgkins is swearing over, is full of stones; that's the one I shall leave behind when I run off! And I like you awfully at first sight, and am sure I shall hate you to-morrow: you're a great deal too pretty, and ever so much too young! Is it all satisfactory, P. French?"

Then they shook hands again, and laughed till Indian Joe

and Jim Hodgkins, looking on from the farther end of the platform, laughed also from sheer infection.

A few minutes afterwards they were seated in the carriage, and driving through the outskirts of the tiny village, turning into a road which led higher up among the hills.

"The pony will probably run away twice before we get home. He usually does; but if you sit still you will come to no harm," said P. French; "only if you scream, I warn you that he will stand on his hind legs and do circus."

"Then I'll scream, for I dote on circus-performances! What is his name?"

"Bones," replied P. French, gravely.

"Why, he's as fat and round as a dumpling!"

"That's why I call him Bones! What a stupid world it would be if one didn't call people and things out of their rightful names! I had a schoolmaster once who christened me Cricket. I worshipped that man. I asked him to marry me, and he wouldn't. I was six years old at the time, but my spirits never recovered from the blow! I am convinced that but for that I should have been a very cheerful young person."

"What does P. stand for, anyway?" asked Miss Grosvenor.

"A great many things,—pie, pudding, pretty, porcelain, persimmons: do you want any more words? I own a dictionary. I bought it when I made up my mind to take boarders. You'll have to pay for that too, and it's a very big one! I've been studying it night and day in order to astonish you by my learning."

"But your particular P.?" questioned Miss Grosvenor, as soon as she could stop laughing. "There must be some letters after it."

"No; there were, but I've dropped them: life is too short to write more than an initial. Well, Phillis, if you will have it, though I hate the name."

"Why, it is as sweet and quaint as it can be. Just made for you!"

"I knew you'd say that," cried P. French, with a delicious little grimace.

"Neat-handed Phillis," added Miss Grosvenor.

"I knew you'd quote that!" cried P. French, and made another grimace, different from the first, and more bewitching.

"And so you have a grandmother, and you and she live together?" pursued Miss Grosvenor.

"Beware!" exclaimed P. French, in a tragic tone. "A dark and awful mystery hangs over our roof: seek not to penetrate it!" Then, in her natural voice, "Yes, we do, and a bad time poor old grandma has of it. Her name is Mrs. Davis. I wanted to advertise for a young man lodger, but she thought the neighbors wouldn't like it. The neighbors are always meddling: I suppose they do everywhere. The lawyer's wife came to see us yesterday, and warned us to be very careful whom we took in, and be sure and demand heaps of references; so I hope you have brought your certificate."

"I've a wonderful recipe for bleaching hair yellow. I should think that would do just as well."

"Better! I shall try it on Doctor's tail; the fur is all worn off, but will color it down to the very bone. Now we are on the top of the hill, just look back! Whoa, Bones; can't you stand still?" The trees had hidden the view before, but now they reached a cleared space. Below, for miles and miles, stretched the long narrow valley, a miracle of color and loveliness,—dotted with villages,—a river creeping through the midst,—the purple mountains shutting in the distance.

Miss Grosvenor feasted her eyes for some moments in complete silence. Miss French watched her face, and gave an approving nod. As they drove on she said,—

"If I were not a religious woman I'd worship you!"

"I know what you mean. Of course I did not exclaim. Why, it is so lovely that there are no words possible at first."

"In spite of being religious I will worship you!" she cried. "Well, there is the house: if it doesn't suit you will have it pulled down and pitch the big umbrella for a tent. Now, see how close I can shave that gate-post. Here's the nest, there come the dogs, and grandma's in the porch! Welcome to the home of humble virtue and conscious worth. I wish it wasn't; I hate both!"

It was as quaint, pretty an old dwelling as a pre-Raphaelite painter could have found to go into ecstasies over, with its gray front darkened by time, its moss-grown roof, its long veranda shaded by masses of wisteria, brimful vines and

creeping roses, and affording a fine view of the valley and mountains.

Grandma Davis was a perfect picture too; so small, so dainty, so brisk in spite of age, that Miss Grosvenor thought the name given Phillis by her former schoolmaster would exactly suit the ancient lady, and she had a cheerful chirping voice which carried out the resemblance.

The interior of the house was designed in an eccentric fashion, calculated to drive to despair any good, commonplace person who "wished things like her neighbors," but its vagaries enchanted Miss Grosvenor. There were winding passages, steps that led nowhere, rooms in the most unexpected places of every size and shape, except rational, respectable, and square, and enough of them to have sufficed for the needs of several large families.

An exquisite neatness and refinement reigned over the whole, and Miss Grosvenor was even taken into the great kitchen, where floor and tables, pots and pans, shone like so many mirrors, and a yellow woman with a bright scarlet bandanna handkerchief on her head looked the fit priestess of the spot.

"This is Ninny," was Phillis French's introduction,— "cook, housekeeper, and tyrant! Originally christened Florinda, but christening had so little effect on her that I shortened her name to see what that would do. She can invent more delicious dishes than any other woman in the State, and, next to her mistress, is the crossiest—"

"Land's sake, Miss Phillis!" exclaimed the mulatto, chuckling and dropping courtesies. "What will the young lady think?"

"Be quiet, Ninny, or I'll bewitch you in a moment!" cried Phillis French. "Where is Cinders? Oh, come here, Cinders." A pretty, well-grown quadroon girl of sixteen appeared, blushing and laughing. "I call her Cinders, because she never had a spot on her," was the explanation. "Now we have seen the house, come look at the garden, and my dairy, and the chickens. Not that you'll ever get either cream or fowls: we send all those things to market, of course."

Presently they had a repast which seemed a sort of compromise between dinner and supper, as tempting as it was unorthodox. Phillis French chattered in the most amusing

fashion, and grandma offered humorous original remarks, and altogether Miss Grosvenor was in a state of ecstasy over everything and everybody.

Towards sunset the two girls had a walk, and conversed till they felt like old acquaintances; not that they touched upon private matters, but they discussed books, and aired their theories, and each secretly pronounced the other a new revelation in the way of youthful womankind.

When twilight deepened, they returned home and sat in the porch, and watched the moon rise, meditating and dreaming in their respective fashions.

Suddenly Miss Grosvenor saw a young man approaching. A screen of wisteria hid her from view, but Phillis had established herself on the veranda steps.

"One of the youthful farmers of the neighborhood—what a giant! The descendants of the sons of Anak must inhabit this region, if he is a fair specimen," thought Georgia, regarding the new-comer, who sauntered leisurely along the path as yet unnoticed by Phillis, deeply engrossed with her white kitten.

A man over six feet in height, loosely put together, and not even possessing a handsome face to redeem his other imperfections. He wore a gray flannel suit, and a rather battered straw hat; in fact, the only thing in his favor was the scrupulous whiteness of his linen.

"So your town lady did not arrive, Miss Phillis?" he called. "No doubt she changed her mind at the last minute: that proves she was some whimsical, fashionable young woman, instead of a female doctor, as we decided her to be."

P. French glanced round with one of her wickedest smiles, as the close of the visitor's speech brought him near the steps.

"Miss Georgia Grosvenor, please answer for yourself," said she. "Mr. Bourke wants to know what your profession is. I warned you this was a suspicious neighborhood."

The visitor perceived the lady addressed; he turned all the colors of the rainbow, and looked so unutterably dazed that Georgia, far from pitying his distress, despised the mammoth for being so shy and awkward.

"I beg pardon," he stammered. "I thought—I understood—"

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"Oh, no, you didn't 'understood,' that's evident," interrupted Phillis. "But never mind, you are not going to be eaten; so please don't look so much as if you had been hastily roasted and served underdone."

Georgia could not help laughing; rather to her surprise, the young man laughed as heartily as she, and, though he was still scarlet, he regarded her boldly in the face.

"If I try for excuse I shall only make matters worse," he said, "so I'd better say what I came for and be done."

"Not to arrest me, I hope," Miss Grosvenor said, pleasantly, though conscious of a certain condescending ring in her voice.

"Not this time," he answered; and at first she was pleased to see he could enter into a jest, and then inclined to consider his speech in the light of a liberty.

"And what did you want, Hop-o'-my-thumb?" asked P. French, still playing with her cat.

"I've had to write another letter to Germany. I just wished you to make sure it is understandable Teutonic."

A young farmer writing letters in German. Miss Grosvenor waxed undemocratic, and ready to sneer at the idea, though, with delightful inconsistency, it did not occur to her to disapprove of the ability of a female farmer to correct his epistle.

"Stand and deliver!" said P. French, and he handed her the letter, just managing to drop it, then to stumble over the skirt of her gown and hurt the cat in regaining his balance. "Sit down before you annihilate somebody, pygmy," she added. "Don't stir when I'm gone. I've a book I want to give you."

She disappeared into the house. The visitor seated himself on the steps, and twisted his battered straw hat about in his hands, by way of finding "a countenance," Miss Grosvenor concluded. She had been idly engaged in braiding a quantity of May roses into a wreath, and she still continued her occupation, rapidly deciding in her own mind that it could not be her duty to entertain P. French's guest. He sat so quiet that at length she glanced up from her task and saw his eyes intently fixed upon her. He proceeded immediately to color like a raw schoolboy, but all the same he looked at her courageously enough.

"I was trying to think of something to say," he observed,

"and every idea that came into my head was a question, and P. French declares it is not polite to ask questions."

Georgia was offended again; she had decided that P. French should be her own special manner of addressing her new acquaintance, and she disapproved sorely of this second liberty on the part of the Anakim.

"Miss French's remarks seem characterized by great sound sense," she replied.

"I believe you!" he exclaimed, and grew more awkward than ever, but added, in a composed voice, oddly at variance with his appearance, "I suppose slang isn't good manners either."

"I suppose not. I have had very slight experience in it, however," returned Georgia, and then remembered that to take the trouble to be annoyed with this unlicked cub was paying him more attention than suited his position or her dignity.

"Haven't you?" he asked. "You've missed a good deal. And I thought American girls liked slang."

Really, this young man, with a battered straw hat, and this odd mixture of shyness and assurance, was an excessively disagreeable person. Miss Grosvenor braided industriously at her wreath, and did not respond.

"Was that impolite too?" he inquired, presently, in a tone which sounded as if he had been studying the matter and found himself unable to resolve his doubts.

"It was a somewhat peculiar speech for an American to make," she said. "I have occasionally seen such statements in foreign journals."

"There was where I found it," returned he. "I've two others that I haven't read yet. I'll go home and burn them before they corrupt my morals still more—no, I mean my manners."

"I think I will advise you to," she said, so gravely that, after glancing keenly at her, he rushed into a fit of awkwardness and blushing which far surpassed his former efforts.

Neither spoke again; Miss Grosvenor braided steadily on; Mr. Bourke maltreated his hat, while his ears grew each instant redder, till they positively resembled two signal-lights; yet when Georgia glanced at him again he was still fixedly *regarding her*, and she fancied that he looked not only obsti-

nate, but disapproving. Certainly in the whole course of her life she had never encountered so inexplicable a phenomenon, such a bundle of contrasts, as this very unpleasant acquaintance of P. French's.

Just then that young lady appeared, calling,—

"Here is the book, Hop-o'-my-thumb! Don't lose yourself and it under a cabbage leaf before you get home."

"I'll try not to," he answered, rising. "Can't I say a word to grandma before I go?"

"Hum!" she said, doubtfully. "I don't know about having grandma's head unsettled by the attentions of giddy young men. Well, come into the kitchen: she is there polishing her knitting-needles with coal-ashes. I must hear what you say: I've my duty to perform by grandma, and I'll do it till she hates me."

She moved towards the door; the giant followed a few steps, then, suddenly recollecting himself, turned back to Miss Grosvenor, and bowed, saying,—

"Good-night, Miss George."

Phillis burst out laughing.

"What have I done wrong now?" he asked, with a rueful face.

"Called her by her Christian name, and even cut off a syllable of that," cried Phillis, in malicious glee.

"Bless my soul!" he fairly groaned, "I'm sure I thought you called her so!"

"I called her Miss Georgia Grosvenor. You were falling over the cat, and only heard half her name," said Phillis. "I should think you would do well to beg her pardon."

Looking up at him, prepared to say something which might relieve his confusion, Miss Grosvenor saw the hopelessly obstinate expression she had already remarked settle over his face.

"She knows I didn't mean to be rude," said he, doggedly; then he joined in Phillis's laughter, and added, in a boyish way, "At least I hope so. I beg your pardon, Miss Grosvenor."

Then he hurried into the passage, and Phillis followed. Presently Georgia saw the pair straying down one of the garden paths, talking very earnestly. Phillis's playful animation *was quite gone; she seemed strenuously insisting upon some-*

thing, and he appeared to be arguing the point. The two passed on, and were hidden from Miss Grosvenor's sight by a clump of lilac-bushes.

"It is too bad," thought she, "to think of a girl like that being thrown away on such a great, coarse country lout. Just the effect of propinquity, nothing else. He can no more appreciate her than I could tell the difference between wheat and rye. Positively it would be a charitable work to turn his head a bit, and so open her eyes. Why, it is worse than *Beauty and the Beast*; it is *Titania and Bottom*."

All of which was as exaggerated and unjust as possible; but Georgia Grosvenor often erred in that way when her prejudices were roused,—prejudices as strong as they were unreasonable. After a while her hostess returned, singing in a half voice a sweet old Irish melody, looking pretty and fairy-like enough to justify Miss Grosvenor's comparison so far as she was concerned.

"And what do you think of my neighbor?" she asked, as she reached the steps.

"I was busy with my flowers: I believe I had not thought," Miss Grosvenor answered.

"Bless me!" exclaimed Phillis. "Not to be impolite to the stranger within my gates, permit me to remark that you speak very much as I do when I tell a fib."

"I hope I am not above the weaknesses of my sex," said Miss Grosvenor, laughing.

"And what do you think of my neighbor?" repeated Phillis. "You asked what P. stood for: pertinacious, among other things! So you may as well speak, because I'll have an answer, if we stop here till midnight."

"I think he is the awkwardest, ugliest, monstrousest creature I ever encountered," cried Miss Grosvenor. "Are you satisfied now?"

"Perfectly," replied Phillis, in a delighted tone. "Do you admire the violin?"

"Why, of course."

"So does he, and plays it like an angel. Do you excel in needlework?"

"Goodness! no."

"Neither does he. Can you speak seven languages?"

"Thanks to my laziness, I cannot."

"Nor can he. Observe the points of resemblance; and yet you hate him! Hark! there is grandma calling me to come in out of the dew. It is so much a matter of habit with her that she would call me just the same if I did not exist, and I never pay any attention. She is the sweetest old darling in the world, is grandma."

"There I agree with you," said Miss Grosvenor, with a strong emphasis on the opening word of her sentence.

"Had we disagreed? Oh! you mean about my neighbor. But, if you remember, I expressed no opinion."

"You have one, I suppose?"

"Have I? I don't know. Listen; I hear an owl. As I'm a Christian woman, I hear an owl, and that idiot of a Lady Jane Grey is out in the grass with her children,—I mean her chickens. If the original owner of the name was as great a goose, she richly deserved to lose her head."

And away ran P. French.

CHAPTER II.

JUST pleasantly fatigued, Miss Grosvenor slept better than she had for weeks, and her first thought when she woke in the morning was one of self-congratulation at being so far away from city sights and sounds.

It seemed a shame to remain in bed an instant longer, and she arose with alacrity and with a sensation of strength such as had not visited her since her illness. As soon as she began to move about; she heard a mocking-bird burst into song; yet neither in the house nor in the veranda had she seen a caged specimen of the species, and she was ornithologist enough to know that Pennsylvania lay too far north to possess the bird as a native inhabitant.

Such an impish, contrast-loving singer! Now it imitated the coo of a pigeon, the notes of a thrush, anon it whistled a bar of a popular waltz, then it indulged in all sorts of marvelous trills and gurgles peculiar to its own race.

Miss Grosvenor ran to the open window, pushed back the shutters, and gazed out. She forgot the mocking-bird in the

entrancing delight of studying the landscape. She could see for miles and miles over valley and hills, river and uplands, till the mountains mingled with the royal-hued clouds and closed in the view.

Another succession of mad trills from the silver-throated songster caused her to look down among the flower-beds under the casement. She only saw Phillis French standing there, regarding her with laughing eyes,—Phillis French, prettier than ever, in a blue-and-white percale costume, with a wicked little straw hat, crossed by knots of azure ribbon, perched above her left ear,—her complexion so brilliant and her eyes so bright that Miss Grosvenor cried,—

“Good-morning, Aurora! Were the gods all asleep when you left Olympus?”

“They got up early and woke me, and wouldn’t give me any peace till I brought you out, so that they might see how you looked in your night-gown. Not the goddesses, mind! Juno said it was improper, and Venus declared you couldn’t stand the toilet.”

“Heavens!” exclaimed Miss Grosvenor, “what a tongue you’ve got! You’re madder than I!”

“I’m not!” retorted Phillis. “I’ll tell my grandma if you talk to me about gods and goddesses. She has brought me up virtuously. I say, you’ve as much hair on your head as when you bade me good-night. I’ll never forgive you! And yours is real gold-color. Oh, you said you had a recipe! Well, I’ve no more time to waste. I’m going out to the fallow.”

“What on earth is that? It sounds very improper.”

“It’s only a burned field ready for the first crop, you poor untutored city girl.”

“I want to go; please wait for me,” said Georgia.

“I will, if you can bathe and dress in less time than woman ever did yet! I’ll make you some coffee while you’re about it regularly,—French (not P),—trois frères.”

“Agreed!” said Georgia, and drew in her head only to put it out again. “Oh, where’s the mocking-bird?” she asked, but Phillis had already disappeared. The songster’s voice burst forth anew, full and rich, and displaying fresh powers of mimicry. “I never heard anything like it. Why, he is worth a small fortune!”

"Go 'way wid your blarney!" cried a hoarse voice from the veranda, and Miss Grosvenor, with a sudden recollection of her dishevelled attire, stepped hastily back, and then Phillis called,—

"The show is free gratis for nothing, my boarder, but we manage to make up for it in the extras."

"Why, it wasn't you!" exclaimed Georgia, again showing herself at the window.

"Oh, no," Phillis answered; "it was grandma. It was the parson. Oh, do go and jump into your bath-tub. Time is money, and Jim Sykes is determined to have his way about that field, and he sha'n't. I know he is right, but I'd rather lose this year's profit than give in. Discipline must be preserved. You may think that is from the Proverbs of Solomon, but it isn't. If you're not down-stairs in twenty minutes, I'll let Jim work his fiendish will with the fallow, and charge it in your account."

In a reasonably brief time Miss Grosvenor made her appearance, and met Phillis emerging from the kitchen.

"Will you have your coffee decorously in the dining-room?" she asked.

"No, in the porch. You called me a heathen; so I shall exercise my privileges," Georgia replied, walking on out into the veranda. Phillis followed, and very soon after came Cinders (whose name seemed a more delicious misnomer than ever, so fresh and pretty did she look), bearing a tray clothed in a snowy damask napkin, whereon stood a little coffee-pot, a covered dish, and the most marvellous cream-color-and-blue cup and saucer and century-old spoon that ever delighted the eyes of a modern curiosity-collector.

Miss Grosvenor seated herself in a rustic chair, and Cinders placed the tray on a table before her.

"What a cup and saucer! What an angelic spoon!" cried Georgia.

"Pour out your coffee, and do see what's in the dish," said Phillis.

Miss Grosvenor raised the cover and ejaculated,—

"Corn-meal muffins! And I vowed last night one could not find them, looking as they ought, outside of Virginia." The perfection of the coffee caused her presently to add, "Why, Alfred de Musset would come back to life to drink

this, and, after he had drunk it, he would write a new poem far beyond 'Ninon,' even!"

"Oh, if you will read me 'Ninon!' I've tried it, Denis Bourke has; but the accent! Now, couldn't you?" exclaimed Phillis, somewhat unintelligibly.

Miss Grosvenor turned rusty at once: she could hardly have told why the speech had this effect upon her, but so it was.

"Denis Bourke and De Musset's 'Ninon' in the same breath!" said she. "You have spoiled both coffee and muffin."

"Luckily, you had nearly finished the two," returned Phillis, rather dryly.

Georgia glanced up with a sudden apology in her face.

"Was I rude?" she asked.

"You couldn't be," Phillis answered, with one of her bright smiles. "But you ill-treated my Denis Bourke! Oh, my fallow, my Sykes, my duties! I go; will you come? If not, farewell, Katherine Mavourneen, it may be four years, and it may be eleven!"

Away she ran down the veranda steps, through the garden, and out into the meadow, so fast that Miss Grosvenor could not overtake her until she was far on in the path leading towards a lovely wood. They strolled along, talking pleasantly, getting away from nonsense for a while, stopping to look back at the view, to listen to the thrushes, to peep into a bird's nest hidden in a thicket of alders; then to see a wonderful wasp's house, which Phillis had discovered; then a peculiar specimen of field-spider, with a body as big as a thimble, busy weaving a silver-colored web; then a long procession of ants, that evidently believed all the work of this earth devolved upon them; an odd kind of toadstool which Phillis said could only be found in this particular spot the county through,—a fairy throne of a toadstool, spotted and ringed with yellow and scarlet tints; then to gather some Indian pipes, that most capricious shaped of all the fungus family, and unknown to Miss Grosvenor; then to pause by the brook and admire the spring flowers and tiny ferns; and then, a little to Georgia's horror, she must needs study the remarkable horned worms on the pollard willows: nothing escaped Phillis French's observation; nothing in nature was mean or unsightly to her.

"You see, it is only men who are ugly," she said. "You shiver at my poor worms. Why, regarded through a microscope they are marvels of color. Now, just look at that fat beetle: how consequential he is! I'm sure he's the one that stitched Cock Robin's shroud. Well, here are some blue butterflies to console you."

"A walk with you is a lesson in natural history," observed Miss Grosvenor. "You know every tree and flower and insect."

"You don't suppose I live with my eyes shut?"

"Most of us do, I think. Now, I am no more a wholesale admirer of nature than I am of humanity. I appreciate her after a fashion, but it never occurred to me to study all the separate items in the count as you do."

"Dear me! According to your flattering verdict, I must be a remarkable person without knowing it," said the other. "I felt sure the moment I saw you that you were gifted with powers of insight, oversight, second sight, and all the rest!"

"P. French, I believe you would jest if you were dying, and tease an angel if he came to visit you! Heavens, how I pity your adorers!"

"Reserve your sympathy, or rather bestow it on me: this neighborhood does not produce the genus you mention."

"Oh, oh!" expostulated Georgia.

"She is a positive young woman, this namesake of a headstrong Southern State," observed Phillis, addressing vacancy; "she is imaginative, too: so there will be a pleasure in helping her to indulge the faculty."

They reached the fallow-field, and Miss Grosvenor sat contentedly on the lichen-covered stump of a tree, while Phillis held a long discussion with her worthy adjutant, and ended by convincing him that not only did she mean to have her own way, but that she was right in her decision.

The two girls wandered on towards a ledge of rocks that formed the base of a steep hill, strayed about in the shade, and discussed numerous subjects, finding so many points of difference in their opinions, and yet so much upon which they were in sympathy, that the study of each other's character proved very interesting. Miss Grosvenor decided that it had not often been her good fortune to enjoy so delightful a morning, and that, among the whole round of people she had

ever met, Phillis French was the most charmingly tantalizing : it seemed utterly impossible to form any idea of what she might do or say next.

"It is nearly noon," the girl observed suddenly, shading her eyes with her hand, to look up at the sun. "I'll take you home through the wood : it is shady and cool there, even at mid-day. By the bye, I never remembered to ask what time you like to dine."

"What is your usual hour?"

"Oh, we don't have dinner, as a rule ; but, as you pay for yours, I suppose you must have it daily."

"I hate dinner in the country!"

"Then what do you say to luncheon at twelve, and a high tea any time in the evening, when we feel disposed?"

"I think it an admirable idea."

"Do you like short-cake filled with raspberry jam?"

"Oh!"

"With cream poured over it?"

"Shade of Lucullus!"

"Then you do like it? I'm sorry, because I meant to have one to-night, but if you approve of it I can't. Boarders must be treated like children : whatever they want is the thing they must not have."

They entered the wood,—the loveliest haunt imaginable, free from underbrush, with capricious paths winding in and out beneath the great pine-trees, which murmured mysteriously in the light wind, looking dark and solemn even in the noontide sunshine, which could only cast broken fantastic gleams through their dense boughs, like weird hieroglyphs, representing the mysterious language they whispered to the upper air.

Between the straight boles, which gave the effect of an aisle in some vast cathedral, Miss Grosvenor caught glimpses of a miniature lake, and presently they came out on its margin, fringed with dogwood-trees and alder-bushes, that dipped their waving branches in the water, over which a flock of wild fowl were swimming slowly in eccentric circles. In the centre was a tiny islet, just large enough to hold a stone-pine and a few blossoming shrubs ; beyond the sparkling sheet spread another stretch of woodland, above which the mountain-tops were visible, bathed in a glory too bright for the eyes to bear.

"What a lovely spot!" cried Miss Grosvenor. "Now, I do hope it owns a pretty name!"

"Nothing more romantic than Deephole," replied Phillis. "It has another title, so you will have a choice,—Podger's Pond. The first is really appropriate: in the middle it is awfully deep. A girl was drowned there a few years ago. She went out in a boat to gather water-lilies, and fell overboard. She was to have been married within a week. Her lover found her, the lily-stems knotted about her neck. She was buried on the day set for her wedding."

"Poor creature!" said Georgia.

"Lucky creature, you mean!" exclaimed Phillis. "Great heavens! only to think of lying down under the cool waves and being at rest,—at rest,—done with it all! Oh, this life holds one good thing in its round wretchedness,—death!"

Miss Grosvenor stared at her in amazement; the girl had her arms stretched out, her eager eyes fastened on the waters. Georgia caught at her dress, with a sudden fear; the face was all the more startling in its tragic intensity from the contrast to its usual mischievous carelessness.

"Miss French!" Georgia ejaculated.

"P., if you please!" returned the other, bursting into a gay laugh.

"Why, you frightened me!" said Miss Grosvenor, almost vexed.

"I thought I'd give you a taste of my melodramatic powers," said she.

"I don't believe it! You were in earnest!" cried Georgia, not really meaning what she said, though that momentary expression which had so utterly changed the lovely countenance had given her a new example of her companion's protean character.

"Of course I was," she answered, in a teasing tone. "I shall end that way sometime, and you'll inherit my pigeon."

"I should say—I don't wish to be hasty in my judgment—but I should say you could be the most exasperating woman that ever existed!"

"I hope so, I am sure," Phillis replied, complacently. "How long do you suppose it will be before we quarrel?"

"Oh, I should fancy the catastrophe might happen at any moment, and recur about sixteen times a day on an average,"

said Georgia, laughing. "You certainly are the most fascinating and inexplicable member of our sex I ever encountered."

"Ah, but your pilgrimage has not been a very long one. If you were a Methuselah of nearly four-and-twenty like myself, you'd have lost the power of being astonished."

"Why, P. French, I thought you were about eighteen,—good four years younger than I."

"*Il y avait une fois un roi qui demandait à un magicien le moyen de connaître les pensées d'autrui. On fit bâtir une maison en cristal que l'on appella le palais de la vérité parce que—*Did you ever read the legend of the Palace of Truth, Miss Grosvenor?"

"Now, where did you learn to speak French with so perfect an accent?" cried Georgia. "Oh, if you don't tell me all about yourself!"

"What was her history?" "A blank, my lord," quoted Phillis, turning into a path which led back to the meadows. "Now, come this way: I've a grain-field you haven't seen."

They walked on in silence for some time, Miss Grosvenor busy with perplexing possibilities in regard to her new acquaintance, which that young lady interrupted by asking,—

"Did you ever meet a woodchuck in your travels?"

"No, no! Where is he?"

"There is a woodchuck's hole, but Denis Bourke shot the owner some months since," replied Phillis.

"Who is taking my name in vain?" called a voice from the other side of the hazel thicket which fringed the edge of the wood.

"Be careful where you step, Miss Grosvenor!" exclaimed Phillis. "That Liliputian is hidden under some toadstool: one might crush the poor little thing without knowing it."

Miss Grosvenor made no answer, but, to judge by her face, she felt annoyed enough at this interruption of their conversation to be wishing it were possible to render her companion's pretended alarm a reality.

"That is the way you mind your work!" continued Phillis, trying to peep over the hedge. "I'll have you arrested if you come trespassing on my land."

"I'm not on your land: this thicket is the dividing-line between our farms!"

"You say so, but it is my belief that you and your surveyor cheated me out of an acre and a quarter."

Mr. Bourke's head and shoulders appeared above the bushes.

"Good-morning," he said. "Miss Grosvenor, I hope you slept well, and are quite rested."

"Thanks," Georgia answered; "my journey was hardly long enough to give me an excuse for calling myself tired."

She spoke with elaborate courtesy, but her voice had taken a chill languid intonation, which caused Phillis secretly to smile.

It was evident that Denis Bourke possessed quicker intuitions than Miss Grosvenor had given him credit for in her hastily-formed judgment of the preceding night. He frowned and looked very black,—that is, metaphorically speaking, for in reality he turned so red that his brown face grew almost brick-color.

"What are you blushing about, Hop-o'-my-thumb?" demanded Phillis, with a laugh of malicious delight. "Perhaps you are embarrassed at meeting us."

"Perhaps I am," he replied.

Miss Grosvenor perceived by the expression of his countenance that embarrassment had no part in his sensations. He was sullen, not shy, and she waxed somewhat indignant that he should presume to take offence at her tone of voice. Phillis looked from one to the other in undisguised amusement.

"Do you want to go up the hill with us, Denis Bourke?" she asked, as well as she could articulate.

"I don't know what you are laughing at," said he.

"But that need not hinder your going," retorted she, teasingly. "Shall we go?" she added, turning to Georgia. "It is farther than by the fields, but there's a nice view."

"Miss Grosvenor won't thank you for giving me the invitation," said Bourke, bluntly.

Miss Grosvenor's face showed a faint surprise at the liberty he took in interpreting her sentiments.

"I am afraid, Miss French, that it would be more than I can attempt this morning," she said.

"I shouldn't have intruded, Miss Phillis!" exclaimed Bourke, with flashing eyes. "I'll bid you good-day: I must be getting home."

He bowed stiffly, and stalked away. Phillis laughed so hard that she had to sit down in the grass. Georgia stood regarding her with a certain displeasure, but the ringing mirth was so infectious that she began to laugh also.

"How does your opinion of my neighbor stand this morning?" demanded Phillis. "Do you think him as awkward and dull as you did last night?"

"I think I may add a tolerable share of presumption to his other qualities," returned Georgia.

"You had three minds to say impertinence!" cried Phillis, in renewed merriment. "Did you change the word for fear of hurting my feelings?"

"I hope I shall never say anything impolite about any of your acquaintances," said Georgia, in a stately fashion.

"Denis Bourke is one of my friends," amended Phillis.

"But I suppose you will not quarrel with me because I cannot at once regard all your friends with your partialities?" said Georgia, with a little asperity.

"No," laughed Phillis. "I'll be content with your promising to like me."

"And I do!" cried Georgia. "It sounds romantic and ridiculous to say, when I never saw you till yesterday, but I feel as if we were old acquaintances already."

She stopped short. She could not venture to express the thought in her mind,—which was, that her interest in Phillis, her admiration for her mental qualities and delicate physical loveliness, caused her to feel horribly vexed at the idea of the girl's conceiving a fancy for this awkward and doubtless half-educated country fellow, just because the chances of life had brought no man worthy of her within reach.

Yet, even while thinking thus, Georgia recalled the tone of Bourke's voice; it was not that of an ignorant person, and, though he evidently possessed none of the conversational readiness so common with Americans of every degree, his speech was free from provincialisms, and from the unpleasant accent which one finds so frequently even among people possessed of book-learning enough to give them claim to be considered as far beyond the average of the cultivated portion of humanity.

She became conscious that Miss French was watching her with a mingled expression of amusement and penetration;

she felt as if the girl were fairly reading everything in her mind, and she grew almost confused under the scrutiny of the beautiful eyes.

"Think the whole out, and decide what you will disclose and what you will keep to yourself," said Phillis, mockingly. "Oh, there is something I forgot to tell Mr. Sykes! Will you sit down and rest till I come? You mustn't tire yourself to death the first day."

Miss Grosvenor elected to wait, and Phillis, after seeing her comfortably established on the mossy turf, with her back against a walnut-tree, went her way, with many laughing injunctions as to Georgia's conduct during her absence. Miss Grosvenor was rather glad to find herself alone for a while; her capricious spirits had deserted her. They had a trick of going up and down as suddenly as mercury in a tube, without even the mercury's excuse of a change in the exterior temperature.

She felt half vexed with Phillis for having been able so easily to read her thoughts, still more with this Denis Bourke for being so near as to make any discussion or reflection concerning him necessary, and positively exasperated with Georgia Grosvenor on account of this irritated mood, equally puzzling and useless.

Like many bright, witty people, she was somewhat melancholy-minded when left to her own resources, and, strive as she might, had never succeeded in conquering a habit of letting her thoughts drift towards unsatisfactory ruminations upon the emptiness and disappointments of life. She fancied this weakness the result of having lived a great deal and being no longer a young girl; but in reality it owed its origin to the fact that she had not lived and felt enough. Her womanhood had owned no strong sensation, and her misanthropy was as baseless as that which youthful poets are wont to display in their (more or less) harmonious verse.

She was roused from what she believed meditation—but which, like most human beings' efforts in that line, was only aimless revery—by the sound of footsteps on the green sward. She raised her eyes and saw Denis Bourke.

"I have come back," said he, abruptly.

He looked neither embarrassed nor sullen now,—simply determined.

"I see you have," she answered, laughing in spite of herself.

"I was afraid you would be gone," he continued, rapidly. "I wanted to say—not that you'll care, but it's for my own satisfaction—that I seemed rude; I didn't mean to. You don't mind, do you?"

Notwithstanding his stalwart form and his heavy moustache, he behaved so like an awkward boy—yet a boy who had the instincts of a well-mannered person—that Georgia could not remember either her vexation or the condescending patronage with which she had regarded him.

"You said nothing to require any excuse," she replied.

"Thanks, you are very good!" said he, paused as if wanting to add something, began to turn red anew, faltered out "Good-by!" and retired behind the thicket as abruptly as he had started forth.

Georgia had just settled herself again into a comfortable attitude, when a cracking among the twigs strewn over the ground betokened another interruption. There stood Mr. Bourke again.

"I beg your pardon," said he; "it's only to say that, on second thoughts, I was a donkey to think it necessary to come. Of course you hadn't paid attention enough to remember I had been here at all."

"Your explanation is quite satisfactory," replied Georgia, divided between a fresh return of vexation and a desire to laugh.

"Good-morning," said he, and vanished.

"This time he really has gone," thought Miss Grosvenor.

Again the twigs rustled. Here he was once more.

"I only wanted to ask you to tell Miss French I am going into the village, and will bring back that saddle," said he.

"You are sure that is all?" Georgia demanded pleasantly.

"Yes. Why?"

"Did you ever read 'Alice in Wonderland'?"

"Oh, you mean the Cheshire cat!" cried he.

"Exactly! He appeared and disappeared so often that Alice declared he made her dizzy."

"And do you—no wonder! Good-by: I'm really off now!"

And this time he was, and Miss Grosvenor sat reflecting until she got so far away from the present that she forgot his

existence, and, indeed, that of Phillis French even, until the voice of the latter made itself heard, carolling a gay ditty, and the graceful creature emerged from the recesses of the wood, pink and breathless with her rapid walk, and apparently in a still higher fund of spirits than when she departed.

CHAPTER III.

By the time Miss Grosvenor had been a fortnight in her new quarters, she felt as much at home with her surroundings as if she had passed years there. The quiet was soothing and grateful, and the freedom from restraint, and from the artificial laws wherewith her aunt hedged in both their lives, an inexpressible pleasure, all the greater because entirely new in her experience.

Georgia's father—a younger son of a noble English family—had died when she was eleven, and her mother two years later. Since that period her home had been with Mrs. Conyngham, the only near relative she possessed, except a half-brother,—also on the maternal side,—whom she loved dearly, and who returned her affection in kind.

Georgia Grosvenor had been a success in society since her appearance therein at seventeen; she was considered a beauty and a wit, and had received adulation enough to have completely turned the head of many a girl, though its chief effect upon her appeared to be the rendering her slightly cynical and somewhat capricious. Satisfied with her life she certainly was not, and she felt a certain contempt for herself because she lacked the energy or courage to turn it into other channels; though this would assuredly have been difficult, and what to do, or what she really wanted, a more hopeless puzzle still.

She had reached two-and-twenty without making the brilliant marriage which everybody had expected of her long since, and had flung aside so many fine offers with what Aunt Conyngham had termed a simple recklessness, that this guide of her youth—the most mundane and managing of women—had been at least half a score of times driven to the verge of despair by the folly and obstinacy of the pupil whom she had

trained so carefully in the worship of her own chief idol, the World.

But new hopes had sprung up in that lady's breast during the present spring. Georgia had at length allowed one aspirant for her hand to persuade her to meditate upon his proposal during those quiet months in the country, and never had the perverse damsel gone so far in her complacency towards any former admirer.

Had Herbert Caruthers raved over the fever in his heart and the fire in his veins, uttered ecstatic promises, demanded affection, and hinted at possible tragic results if disappointment overtook his hopes, Georgia would have sent him to the right-about as unceremoniously as she had her other suitors. But Mr. Caruthers had done nothing of the sort: he was too dignified, and held his feelings too firmly in check, ever to rave upon any subject. His sentiments were definable by the words admiration and esteem, and his demands upon her limited to the significance of the latter term.

He was very wealthy, fine-looking, and forty-one,—all these possessions which suited Georgia's ideas, if marriage must be contemplated. But Mr. Caruthers had personal merits which appealed strongly to her, though she admitted that they required the addition of what might be termed his trio of accidental gifts, namely, the money, the good looks, and the age; especially the latter, for a young man would have stipulated for love, and Georgia had no faith in her capacity to meet such demand.

He was a lawyer, standing in the front rank of his profession, a politician, highly cultivated, agreeable, generous and, best of all, exceedingly ambitious. Now, Georgia was a very ambitious woman, only if she married she wanted a husband upon whom she could centre all her aspirations, and so obtain that vicarious gratification which to certain feminine natures is the pleasantest form of all.

She had met Mr. Caruthers in Europe when she had gone over for a brief summer holiday, and on her return to America had resumed their acquaintance with a satisfaction which rather surprised herself. A year had elapsed since Georgia's coming back, and up to the time of her setting forth for Phillis French's farm-house, scarcely a day had gone without her seeing Mr. Caruthers. So she had learned to know him well,—that is, as well as men and women meeting under con-

ventional restraints ever can know one another,—and so to like him. He had been so guarded in his conduct that she had not dreamed of ranking him among the list of even possible adorers, though I cannot in conscience allow him to take credit for that wisdom. Aunt Conyngham—his confidante from the first—had counselled such tactics, and kept him up to them too, sometimes with considerable difficulty, until he discovered, by the progress he was making in his intimacy with Georgia, that her relative's Machiavelian policy was the only safe one he could pursue.

When, before her departure for the country, Mr. Caruthers did ask her to marry him, Georgia was so completely taken by surprise that, had she been possessed of less reflective faculty, she might, in the state in which she was,—tired mentally, weak physically,—have replied in the affirmative, and afterwards held to her pledge from a sheer dread of giving pain,—always a potent reason with a woman, unless she is a born flirt or has grown hard and bitter towards men from having suffered through some particular member of the sex. The offer was tempting, for participation in his aims would give an object to existence, which she had scores of times told him seemed so frivolous and empty. He asked, too, nothing beyond what she had it in her power to give,—friendship and esteem; and he pleaded his cause well, begging her to trust to his assurances, to put by thought (a thing strictly ordered by the physicians in a tone of announcing something as easy as to avoid going out in the rain or wetting one's feet), and let her devoted friend perform this troublesome operation for her.

But, weary and helpless and hopeless as she was under the horrible depression caused by the suffering arising from that mysterious malady termed "disordered nerves," Georgia had not reached a point at which she could lose her strong individuality sufficiently to go to this extreme. The utmost Mr. Caruthers could gain was a promise to consider the matter during the summer and give a response when she returned to town. As soon, or nearly as soon, as she had promised this, she grew frightened, and wanted to end the matter there and then; but Aunt Conyngham had vowed such conduct would be brutal, and Mr. Caruthers had said—and said it in nice phrase, too—that it would be unjust to her as well as to himself. Georgia remained two weeks in town after that conver-

sation, and Mr. Caruthers proved so exactly what she could wish in every respect, that Georgia could not be sorry for what had happened, especially as she told him frankly that she had not the slightest idea she should ever change her no (which he would not let her utter) into the wished-for yes. She admitted that it would be pleasant to remember there was a faithful friend always thinking of her, and she would answer his letters,—friendly letters being understood.

So this was the work Miss Grosvenor had before her, though it must be admitted that she had not yet commenced her task, unless answering a cheerful letter she received by an equally cheerful though more brief epistle, and telling herself that when thoroughly rested she must begin to think seriously, could be considered a step in that direction.

Somehow the days floated on with such rapidity that she seemed to have no leisure for anything outside their pleasant details, though they were so monotonous in their pleasantness that she forgot to notice how fast they fled. Daily the world looked farther and farther off, and already Aunt Conyngham's frequent communications only seemed an echo from the great ocean, a restless murmur, which merely increased the grateful sense of repose in the haven she had so unexpectedly reached.

Phillis French continued always a delightful study, as difficult as it was interesting; indeed, in most respects this entire episode proved a fresh revelation to Georgia. She had spent the larger portion of her past in Europe, and her knowledge of American life was confined to the habits of rich, idle people in great cities: of the ways of living among quiet country homes she positively knew much less than she did of the habits of Tyrolese peasants or Italian contadini. Here she found herself in the companionship of a girl really better cultivated than half the women of her acquaintance; a lady in every sense, and uniting with her accomplishments and her knowledge of books a practical mastery over the work-a-day side of existence which Georgia, if she had ever thought about the matter, would have considered incompatible with the former qualities, though now that the case was brought before her eyes she recognized clearly the absurdity of her old opinions.

Phillis French overlooked her farm, was as wise in the rotation of crops as if she had been a ploughman, a good judge of

live-stock, from horses to pigs, and, in-doors, was able not only to superintend affairs, but, if need were, to do everything herself, from making a pudding to roasting the meat, and do it all in the highest style of art. That abomination, beef baked until utterly juiceless and tasteless, never disgraced her table; a soup-kettle prevented the horrible waste of excellent materials which, as a rule, goes on in American middle-class houses, and provided without trouble or expense the dish that ought for health's sake to be the first at the daily hearty meal which the human animal must have. Then, too, Phillis French's domain contained every modern invention for the easier and swifter performance of household labor, from the patent clothes-wringer to the sewing-machine.

"They seem a little extravagance in the buying," she said one day, when discussing such matters with Georgia, "but in the end they prove a saving in actual money, as well as in the wear and tear of bodily strength. The woman who shirks her duties, however coarse or distasteful, is a monster; the woman who spends an hour more than is absolutely necessary over physical drudgery is a wilful sinner."

"Strong," said Miss Grosvenor, "but true."

"Up to the present generation," pursued Phillis, "American women in the country made a god of housework; they got themselves into a state of mind where to sit down and read a book, or to take a day's amusement, seemed a positive crime."

"Luckily, ideas have changed," said Georgia.

"Yes; but you may still find plenty of women with more than average abilities—in their girlhood fairly educated—who for years have buried their immortal souls in bread dough, stifled them under rag carpets,—who have worn out youth and wasted talents in constant and perfectly unnecessary toil,—women with whom it is an article of religion that the very broom-handles should be scrubbed, and, if they could find nothing else to do, would turn over the boards of the kitchen-porch floor and scrape them with a case-knife."

"Are not the men in fault?" asked Georgia. "American masculine stomachs, apparently, require so much rich food to satisfy them."

"That is the fault of the mothers," said Phillis. "When the children want to eat between meals, they are given pie and cake instead of wholesome bread and butter. Why, you will

still find plenty of farm-houses in which people eat sweet-cake and pastry at breakfast, and conclude with a similar performance just before going to bed, and yet they wonder that dyspepsia is the curse of the land. The boys grow up expecting to have the same régime in their own houses because 'mother did,' and the girls expect to gratify their husbands for no better reason."

"You ought to deliver a public lecture on the subject," returned Georgia, laughing at her friend's energy.

"I'd like to," said Phillis. "I would tell every girl who means to marry a farmer to insist that her bridegroom should buy all sorts of labor-saving machines, down to that for pitting cherries: he can do it for his farm, why not for his kitchen? They will cost no more money than the silver teaspoons and the fine parlor furniture for a room that won't be opened twice a year. Besides, they'll keep her so young and fresh that, instead of wondering, after a few years of married life, if he shall wed pretty Jane Stokes when he buries the faded, bony creature whose nerves are all outside her skin, and who greets him with a sob or a snarl, she will remain pleasant in her husband's eyes,—a helpmeet and not a drag."

Just here grandma looked in at the door, and said, in her soft, flute-like old voice,—

"Has my girl mounted her hobby, Miss Grosvenor? Be patient and let her ride it to death, for she'll give you no peace until she does."

They all three laughed heartily, and Phillis vowed that she would waste no more wisdom upon either of them, at least for that morning.

Grandma French and Georgia speedily became great friends, and, as Phillis's occupation threw Miss Grosvenor upon her own resources during the greater portion of each day, she fell into the habit of spending a good deal of time in the old lady's special sitting-room,—the pleasantest, coseyest nook in the whole house.

Grandma was several years the senior of the century, but her mental faculties were clear and vigorous as ever,—her memory, in particular, really something marvellous. She was the gentlest and sweetest of human beings, and her influence insensibly permeated like sunshine the hearts of all about her. Her nature had softened and widened until the shackles of

theology possessed no hold upon her mind ; human creeds and doctrines were lost in the heavenly light which illuminated her soul, the boundless faith and charity which united to make the " perfect love that casteth out fear," and rendered life one constant psalm of thanksgiving.

Georgia found herself in a mood wherein occupation of any sort seemed an appalling effort, so it suited her to sit and listen to the ancient lady's quaint poetical talk, and if conscience pricked her for being so incorrigibly idle, she could quiet it by reflecting that she was not entirely useless, since her companionship gave pleasure to some one human being.

She soon discovered that grandma shared her predilection for romances and dramatic verse, so she brought out her stores of books, and they read them together. Phillis laughingly declared that the town-bred young woman was hopelessly contaminating her venerable relative's morals, and that she should be forced to send them both to the strictest boarding-school within reach. But, in spite of her strictures, she read the romances also, and enjoyed them, though much given to cynical criticisms in regard to the sentimental portions. As for the poetry, the reading that aloud became her allotted task, after Georgia discovered what new interest and significance her wonderful elocutionary powers gave the familiar dramas, when excitement caused her for the time completely to merge her own identity in Imogene's sorrows or Rosalind's wit.

Georgia's attempts to fathom Phillis's character were incessant, but made in no cold spirit of curiosity to gratify a predilection for psychological studies. She loved the girl, and, though she smiled at herself for rushing into a sudden friendship as if she were an enthusiastic miss of sixteen, her mockery did not modify her feelings.

Phillis returned Miss Grosvenor's affection frankly and warmly, but she made no confidences. Georgia knew that her own theories were sufficiently colored by her personal experience to enable any acute person to form a tolerably correct idea of what that experience had been, and, applying this rule to her new friend, she was puzzled to understand how into a youth, spent in that retired spot, there could have come what seemed an actual knowledge of the great cruel world outside,—a knowledge which had been bought, too, by bitter suffering.

However, grandma's disclosures afforded the information

that the girl had not always lived in this quiet home, so a wider sweep was given to Georgia's imagination, though she did not succeed in arriving at any fixed conclusions, could not even get far enough to decide whether her idea that Phillis had somewhere borne pain and trouble, had any foundation, or was merely the outgrowth of her own fancy.

CHAPTER IV.

WE should all be ready enough to admit that if we look at a landscape through a colored glass its appearance must vary according to the tint of the lens employed, and we might also magnanimously acknowledge that, whether the spectacles were rose-hued or azure, in neither case should we have seen the real color of the objects, and that we could only do so by regarding them with the naked eye.

But we are all beautifully oblivious of the fact that we regard our fellow-men, whether we rank them under the head of friends, enemies, or indifferent acquaintances, through the medium of our personal prejudices, favorable or otherwise; and the unfortunate part of the business is that we cannot throw aside our mental spectacles at will. The consequence is obvious; yet it does not affect our feelings towards the person, or control the glibness with which we pronounce judgment, though we can perceive plainly enough the blunder other people make in studying friends or enemies by the same means.

Georgia Grosvenor was neither more nor less reasonable than the rest of us, and each time that she met Denis Bourke she unconsciously tried to find characteristics in him which would coincide with the opinion she had formed on the night of her arrival. During the first few days he came to the house every morning or evening, then his visits grew less frequent, and very often when he did come, he forbore to intrude his presence upon Miss Grosvenor. But she was greatly annoyed whenever she discovered that he and Phillis had been together, for, as acquaintance increased her admiration for her new companion, she naturally disliked more and more the idea of

this clever, brilliant creature being deluded into the belief that she could care for the great awkward man whom chance had flung in her path. So determined was Georgia to decide that such caring would be a waste of mind and sentiment on Phillis's part, that she would not for an instant contemplate the possibility that destiny itself might have arranged this matter of propinquity.

When she did meet Bourke, she never conversed with him except upon the most ordinary subjects, steadfast to her credence that what education he possessed must be of the narrowest and most superficial kind. When, now and then, in her hearing he grew earnest in discussion with Phillis, or interested in some talk with grandma, and enunciated sentiments which showed both culture and thought, Georgia hastily added another prop to her preconceived opinions by assuring herself that he had probably been reading an editorial in some journal, and was appropriating its eloquence.

Now that he had apparently determined to cease any effort to cultivate her acquaintance, she seemed to have lost the power of rendering him uncomfortable, and he got over that trick of turning red and awkward in the odd fashion which had so perplexed her, because she could never decide whether it meant shyness or a repulsion responsive to her own. She scornfully admitted that the change was an improvement, since he appeared less like an overgrown school-boy going up for punishment; but gradually a certain sense of strength and sustained purpose which pervaded his conversation began to irk her; though why the fact of his proving a man who could not be laughed at, or whose opinions could not be disregarded, should have this effect, was a puzzle she could only elucidate by putting it down to the account of her fears for Phillis.

That astute young woman said nothing. Mr. Bourke would have had reason to regard her as a very lukewarm friend, could he have known the manner in which she received the sage counsels Miss Grosvenor bestowed upon her. Of course she was never guilty of the impertinence of attempting to advise or caution Phillis French; but she generalized a great deal upon the folly of girls throwing themselves away, fancying men beneath them in intellect and education, and the petty and unendurable miseries which must be the conse-

quence of such insanity. Phillis listened, and her eyes brightened with fun, but she gave no other signs of perceiving that the wisdom was meant to apply to her own special case.

Then Miss Grosvenor began to discover that the offensive young man held certain theories which she stigmatized as communistic, contrary to all received doctrines of law and order. One night, when she entered the parlor and heard him expounding his ideas to Phillis, she could not resist an onslaught upon his false premises and (what she considered) his borrowed sophistries. He defended his position, and, before Georgia knew it, she got deep in a controversy, and too much interested and excited to remember how completely she was breaking down the barrier of restraint and ceremonious civility wherewith she had hitherto hedged in their intercourse.

He talked so eloquently, and his views were so original to her at least, that now and then she even forgot to make use of her own weapons, and listened with as much pleasure as grandma and Phillis, and when she did cut and thrust she perceived that she had found a foe too strong for her, even though she brought in as allies all the conservative principles and precepts which memory and reading could summon to her aid.

Phillis said just enough to urge them both on and heighten their interest. After Mr. Bourke took his leave, Georgia discovered that she had enjoyed the evening very much, and felt proportionately indignant with the gentleman therefor.

"Grandma," said Phillis, "Master Denis has found his tongue again."

"And he talks well, does he not, Georgia?" the old lady asked.

"Oh, yes," Miss Grosvenor assented, rather grudgingly. "But I never heard such horrible theories outside of the orations of some German Internationalist Society."

"Yet Christ taught the doctrine of general brotherhood," observed grandma, softly; and of course Miss Grosvenor could say no more.

But when the old lady had retired, Georgia could not resist adding, "There is no creature so arrogant as a self-made man."

"So I have read in foreign novels," Phillis answered demurely.

"I suppose Mr. Bourke thinks the rich men in the States ought to be obliged to give up their property to the control of himself and his fellow-fanatics," continued Georgia; "he has only to go a little further and he will be ready to burn barns like English rioters, by way of preparing himself for Parisian communistic performances on a grand scale."

"To judge from what he has already done, I should say he would stop at nothing," returned Phillis.

"What has he done?" asked Georgia. "Got himself into very bad odor with all the sound, substantial men of the neighborhood, no doubt."

"I think he has," said Phillis, "with some of them at least."

"I suppose he has been pointing out that it is their duty to divide their goods among him and his associates."

"No; only offering a practical example. He has a large farm and a coal-mine, and he manages them on a sort of co-operative plan. I don't understand much about it, but I dare say you would, if you could get him to explain his ideas."

Miss Grosvenor signified by an expressive gesture that not for worlds would she listen to any such exposition from the misguided young man, but she only said,—

"Perhaps when he is quite ruined he will perceive the falsity of his creeds."

"I don't know. You say yourself he is the most obstinate man you ever met," Phillis replied.

"At all events, he will probably soon have the opportunity of finding out that his theories are rather expensive to carry into execution," said Georgia.

"I don't know that either," Phillis answered. "So far, his plan works well enough: even what you call the sound, substantial portion of the community admits that. I don't suppose he makes much money, but at least he loses none."

Georgia knew by the quiet, indolent tone that Phillis wished to irritate her into further energetic condemnation of Mr. Bourke and his errors; so she retired from the subject with a stateliness which had the effect of making her friend laugh outright, though she would give no explanation as to the reason of her merriment when asked therefor.

For a day or two Miss Grosvenor settled down on the belief that Denis Bourke was a lunatic or a demagogue, either qualifying himself for an insane asylum, or preparing the way to become the Congressional candidate for the Working-Man's party,—not that Georgia knew very well what this might mean, but something subversive to law and order, she felt confident.

The conversation of the evening appeared to have dissipated a portion of Mr. Bourke's fears that the town lady found his visits a bore, for during the next few days he was a good deal at the house. Georgia formed numerous dignified resolutions, yet he never came without her finding herself drawn into an argument, for they seldom agreed upon any topic; but she had to admit that he talked well and possessed intelligence of no common order.

She took her revenge by discarding the possible excuse of lunacy in his behalf, and accepted the theory of his being a demagogue, and one night got so heated in discussion that she told him as much. She was shocked at the speech, which amused the others, and the contrition her politeness, if not her conscience, forced her to confess, went far towards carrying their acquaintance on to familiar and amicable intercourse.

One after another numerous instances of his kindness and generosity came to her knowledge, and she began to wonder how it happened that she could have passed three weeks in his vicinity and heard so little,—forgetting that his name had been tacitly an almost tabooed subject in her presence.

She did not even know where he lived. The road to his farm led up a very steep hill, which she had not yet had strength to climb, and when she and Phillis drove out, the latter always avoided the route, declaring it beyond the wind and strength of Bones, the pony; though I doubt if Phillis was quite honest in this declaration. She so hugely enjoyed Georgia's blunders and misconceptions that she prolonged them by every means in her power, and delighted in the series of surprises which each day brought to the young lady, reserving the sight of Denis Bourke in his own house as the crowning stroke.

One afternoon Miss Grosvenor set forth on a solitary ramble, and took her way through certain fields, which she knew possessed stiles and gates that would render her progress easy enough. Unfortunately, a black bull belonging to Farmer

Petherick, whose lands adjoined those of Phillis French, had chosen this very afternoon to break out of his pasture and indulge in a promenade, and had selected the exact route chosen by Miss Grosvenor, only in the inverse direction.

The charms of freedom had driven him as mad as any socialist ever condemned by Georgia and other conservatives, and he leaped and bellowed, and dashed recklessly at all objects, as if to his eyes everything, from a stump to a sheep, looked like a red rag. As Georgia approached from one quarter, the bull came plunging down a hill which she had intended to skirt; they caught sight of each other at the same instant. Georgia gave one shriek, and the bull one bellow; then they both stood still,—Georgia because she was too frightened to stir, and the bull perhaps deciding whether he should most enjoy trampling her under his hoofs or tossing her on his horns, which appeared as big as young trees to Miss Grosvenor's terrified gaze.

Then, from a third point in the compass, descended a *Deus ex machinâ*,—no less than Mr. Denis Bourke, carrying over his shoulder a huge umbrella nearly as large as a tent, which old Mrs. Petherick had lent him a few evenings before, when overtaken by a storm near her house, and which, demagogue though he might be, he possessed honesty enough (very fortunately, as it happened for Georgia) to have the intention of restoring to its owner.

"Run for the stile!" he shouted; and Miss Grosvenor ran, so frightened that she did not recognize either him or his voice: she had just sense enough left to obey the command.

But she was too blind to notice which direction she took, and got nowhere near the stile. She half climbed, half stumbled over a rail fence, and, as she was far from strong, physical weakness forced her to lie still where she fell.

Miss Grosvenor got her courage back, and waxed furious with herself for having been so alarmed; morally she was a brave woman, but the bold spirit had been put inside a physique too delicate to be in keeping. She peered through the rails and perceived Denis Bourke: he had opened the great umbrella full in the bull's face, and the animal, with one ear-piercing bellow, turned tail and fled with the speed, if not the grace, of a deer.

There is nothing which terrifies man or beast like the un-

known, and Georgia's enemy, being unacquainted with umbrellas, was as much scared by the sudden charge as you or I would be if the sun were to set at mid-day. With the lack of generosity common to mortals, Mr. Bourke paused an instant to smile at the ridiculous figure presented by his vanquished combatant; then he crossed the field and vaulted lightly over the fence.

Miss Grosvenor saw him coming, and managed to assume a sitting posture. She tried to rise, but the violent effort she had made had left her so weak that this was out of the question. However, in spite of feeling very sick and faint, she strove hard to look composed, aware that her attempt was less successful than she could have wished, though her head was too dizzy for her to suffer greatly from the humiliation.

"I hope you are not hurt?" Bourke cried.

"Not a bit," Georgia replied in gasps, "but I would rather have been. I was an idiot to have had such a fright for nothing."

"Scarcely for nothing," he answered, smiling at her manner; but when he got near enough to notice her pallor and the violence with which her heart was beating, he looked somewhat anxious.

"There certainly would have been reason if you had not come to my rescue," she said, recollecting that the least she could in decency do was to exhibit some sign of gratitude for his assistance. "I—I am so much obliged to you—I—"

"To my umbrella, you mean," he interrupted, gayly, though still watching her with that expression of solicitude.

"I shall never go into a field again without being armed with the hugest one the land can supply," said Georgia. As she spoke, she tried again to rise, thinking the faintness had passed. But she tottered, put out her hands, and, through the partial insensibility which paralyzed mind and body, she was conscious of being lifted in Denis Bourke's arms and carried for some distance down the path.

When she could open her eyes and think clearly, she found herself seated on the turf, with her back against a tree, close to a little spring that bubbled up from under a moss-grown rock, and Denis Bourke was bathing her forehead. Presently she recovered voice to thank him, and declared her ability to walk home.

"You must sit still for a while," he said, with a certain calm authority in his tone, which on any ordinary occasion might have roused Miss Grosvenor's ire, but just now she could not summon energy to offer the slightest opposition.

Indeed, she was subdued enough to be thankful to have somebody near to give her a positive command,—even if the speaker were Denis Bourke.

In a little time she got back to a more natural state of mind and body,—could talk,—even try to jest, by way of proving to herself and him that she had quite recovered.

"How I must have run!" she said, laughing. "I think I should have made an excellent model for a modern Atlanta."

He was careful not to laugh, and sufficiently wise to say, "The bull occupied me so entirely that I had no time to look. The first I saw of you was when I reached the fence. I rather think you must have flown."

"I tore one of my wings, at all events," she said, holding up the dark-brown ruffle which decorated her serviceable tussore gown.

"Luckily, the rent is slight enough to be repaired by a few pins judiciously applied," he answered.

"Yes, but I have no pins. I must tie the ends up in some fashion, else I shall trip over them in walking."

He produced a tiny flat cushion from his coat-pocket, well furnished with the requisite articles. This proof of methodical habit and care was so out of keeping with Georgia's idea of his character and blundering ways, that astonishment prevented her remembering that a man given to such old-bachelor tricks had always been as abhorrent to her as one who wore galoshes.

"Confess you wouldn't have given me credit for so much foresight," said he. "P. French gave me this pincushion, so I always carry it."

"Oh!" said Georgia, and began arranging her plumage. Even at this moment, when feeling better disposed towards him than she had ever done before, she did not like to be reminded of the terms of intimacy upon which he stood with her pretty Phillis.

He watched the operation of mending the ruffle for a little, then he said,—

"You don't use half pins enough. Now, is it because you can't bear to touch anything which belongs to me, or because it vexes you that P. French should condescend even to make me so trifling a gift?"

If a mole, which just then skurried past, had spoken and informed her that the bow on her hat was scarlet, Miss Grosvenor could not have been more astounded! This man had perceptions sufficiently keen and delicate to have so far penetrated her sentiments during the past weeks that he could correctly interpret even so slight a sign as she had just given. Georgia felt herself color,—an additional betrayal.

"I have a conscience; I did not wish to rob you," she said, laughing rather nervously.

"Oh, you can give me back the pins when we get to the house," returned he; "but if you were to rob me of P. French's friendship, you could not restore it."

He was laughing too when he began to speak, but before he finished, his voice sounded grave,—slightly reproachful. Georgia would have liked to grow angry; she could not. Everything about the man seemed to present itself in a new light; for the first time she really respected him. He could be bold even to audacity, if his rights were infringed upon, and she admired this quality.

She rose; he stood looking full at her; she looked full at him, for she was not a woman to shrink from any position in which her own words or acts placed her, though it had been a thousand times more difficult.

"I might not be able," she said. "Whether I try or not, will depend upon yourself."

"What can I do?" he asked. "You don't like me, and you won't get acquainted with me."

"I promise to do my share towards that last, if you wish it," she replied.

"Then that's an agreement," he exclaimed. He held out his hand, then partly drew it back. Georgia waited a second: if he had appeared confused, she would have been cruel enough to disregard his hesitation. But he was looking full in her face still, not angrily, not defiantly, but with that dogged determination she had so often noticed, which just now she rather approved. Half against her will she extended her hand; he took it, but did not press her fingers, and the distinction was

to her a fresh proof that she had slandered him when she pronounced his perceptions dull and coarse.

Not another word on that subject was exchanged; they began at the same instant to speak of indifferent matters. Before they reached the house he was telling her about buck-wheat-growing, apropos to some question she asked, and their whole conversation remained as friendly and commonplace as possible.

So it came about that Phillis French, standing in the porch in front of her dwelling, saw the pair come up the path. The sight filled her with such amused astonishment that a vent therefor she must find, and, as she would not for worlds have betrayed her surprise to Georgia, she stepped back, and fairly shook her grandmother to and fro in her chair.

"You crazy child, you've made me drop a stitch," said the dear old lady, too much accustomed to her grand-daughter's eccentricities even to ask what had occasioned this outburst.

"You may be thankful I didn't pinch you, granny," whispered Phillis. "Only look—look!"

Grandma peered out through the screen of green leaves, and nodded her head intelligently, with a pleasant smile. Phillis having relieved her mind, moved forward and received the new-comers with the innocence of a dove.

"I am glad you have brought Denis Bourke with you, Georgia," said she: "I want him to mend my hoe-handle."

"Mr. Bourke brought me," returned Georgia. "We have had a fight with old Uncle Petherick's black bull; he wanted to toss me on his horns, and Mr. Bourke declined to allow him that satisfaction."

Grandma was rather alarmed, and very sympathetic. Phillis shared in the latter sentiment for a few moments, then began to tease Bourke upon his prowess, vowing that she should buy, beg, or steal the big umbrella of Mrs. Petherick, and set it up in the hall as a tutelar goddess, to be saluted solemnly by Georgia and Denis each time they passed.

But when Bourke was gone, and Miss Grosvenor got away to her room, Phillis rubbed her hands in glee, and had a long hearty laugh to herself. In the mean time Georgia, in the solitude of her chamber, sat reflecting with a good deal of wonder upon the fact of her having entered into an amicable compact with that self-made man,—that socialist,—that dema-

gogue,—Denis Bourke ! But the most surprising thing of all was that she could not regret it so much as she should have expected to do, had any Cassandra prophesied the occurrence an hour before it happened.

“ I’ll be just, at all events : I begin to believe I have not been,” she thought. “ If I have misjudged and undervalued him, I shall tell Phillis so frankly ; and if she likes him—well—But, oh, dear, I wanted something so different for her !”

At this juncture her reverie was interrupted by the voice of that young lady outside her door, and Miss Grosvenor was obliged to put by her reflections till a more convenient season.

CHAPTER V.

FOR a couple of days after the adventure with Farmer Petherick’s bull, it struck Georgia that Phillis French had lost her ordinary spirits. She kept so constantly occupied that grandma and Miss Grosvenor scarcely saw her from morning till night, and when she did sit down with them was either too tired to talk, or else so restless and excited that her gayety seemed unnatural.

But grandma appeared to notice nothing unusual in her manner, and Georgia of course concealed her suspicion that the recurrence of some anniversary or other troublesome reminder of the past had given a shock to the cheerful equanimity wherewith the girl accepted her present existence. And yet Georgia had to admit that Phillis went beyond patient acceptance of her destiny. She was full of health and strength, and evidently thoroughly enjoyed her life ; she liked managing the house, and delighted in her farm. Indeed, she was in every way a riddle, which this present phase of character only added to the difficulty of solving.

On the third evening, Denis Bourke came to the Nest ; he had been in and out several times in the course of these days, and once Georgia had seen him and Phillis walking through the fields. But on this occasion he spent a couple of hours, and, even to Miss Grosvenor, his presence proved a pleasant addition to their little home group.

Apropos to some remark he made about his place, Georgia observed that she did not know yet just where he lived; whereupon Phillis, who had been sitting apart almost in silence, cried out,—

“You shall invite us to a high tea, Denis Bourke. There is an honor! Grandma will be glad of an opportunity to flirt with you, and Miss Grosvenor and I can play propriety. Let me see: to-morrow won’t do, I shall be busy; so we will set Thursday. Be sure you give us waffles, for your Tabitha makes them to perfection. What do you say, Georgia? shall we gratify this benighted young man by accepting his invitation?”

“I have heard none given, except by you,” replied Georgia, laughingly.

“Oh, I should be so glad if you would come!” cried Bourke, with eagerness. “You must not expect a poor bachelor’s den to be in such order as this house, you know.”

“Don’t trouble yourself to give superfluous information,” responded Phillis, before Miss Grosvenor could speak. “But wouldn’t you suffer if Tabitha or Patrick heard you, when they are wearing their precious lives out in care for you and your belongings? We will pay him the visit, Georgia; that is settled.”

“I should like it very much,” said Georgia.

“That is superfluous also, after my saying we were to go,” retorted Phillis. “Grandma, don’t encourage insubordination by tittering in the corner. Really, all you thoughtless young people are a great worry to me. If I’d not the makings of a saint in my disposition, I don’t know how I should support my burdens.”

She rushed without warning into one of her wildest, most nonsensical moods, and forced them all to laugh and be merry; so genuinely gay herself, that Georgia inclined to think her impression that the girl had been troubled or in low spirits, a mere figment of her own imagination. Thursday proved a beautiful day, and towards sunset the three ladies started to fulfil their engagement.

Mrs. Davis could seldom be persuaded to trust herself in a carriage, but this afternoon she consented to do so, on condition that one of the farm-horses should be substituted for the pony,—a lack of confidence in that mischievous animal which

Phillis declared would break his heart and spirit if the slow, ugly quadruped put in his place should boast of the honor, as no doubt he would on the first convenient occasion, and be so set up too by his own advancement as quite to ruin him for his rightful position in life.

Denis Bourke's farm lay a mile and a half off by the highway, though a path across the fields and through the wood greatly lessened the distance for any pedestrian equal to the exertion of climbing the steep hill near the little lake,—a feat which of course the dear old grandmother could not attempt.

The road branched off from the main route not far beyond the Nest, gave a sharp turn to the left, skirted the wood and lake, then wound up a long ascent, on the summit of which a poplar-lined lane led to Bourke's habitation,—an ambitious stone mansion, with a turret and a colonnade, but wearing a somewhat gloomy aspect in contrast to Phillis's bower-like domain.

The appearance of the house surprised Georgia, and she showed it. Grandma explained that the dwelling had been erected many years before by some gentleman as a summer home; it had stood vacant for a long time after his death, and Denis Bourke had bought the house and large farm attached at a very moderate rate.

Then Georgia caught a quizzical smile on Phillis's face, and was vexed that she had broken a rule she had made herself, never to ask a question in regard to the young man.

As they drove up, Bourke appeared in the veranda, followed by a couple of beautiful dogs, whose possession Miss Grosvenor began envying on the instant.

He helped the ladies out of the carriage, but, beyond a cordial welcome, had no leisure to pay any attention to his two youthful guests until he had conducted grandma in-doors and established her in an easy-chair in the wide entrance-hall, which Georgia observed was furnished like a living-room, after a fashion very common in English country-houses, a fact which occasioned her a second sensation of surprise.

"Miss Phillis," said Bourke, when satisfied that he had done all he could to render his ancient friend comfortable, "if there's anything you young ladies want to do to yourselves, Tabitha will take you up-stairs."

"*Our best thanks for your elegantly expressed proposal,*"

returned she, "but our paint does not rub off easily, and we can lay our hats on the table; it is too hot to attempt any unnecessary exertion."

"It was very, very good of you to come, Miss Grosvenor," said Bourke.

"She knows that," cried the incorrigible Phillis.

"Very good of you, Mr. Bourke, to allow that naughty girl to bring us," added Georgia.

"And you have spoiled my nice speech, Miss Phillis," he continued, laughing; "I had it all learned by heart, and you've put it quite out of my head."

"Hearts and heads have nothing to do with one another," pronounced Phillis. "But I will give you an opportunity to try and remember your poetical effort. Since I had neither part nor lot therein, I shall go and pay my respects to Tabitha, and perhaps you will have finished your blank verse by the time I get back."

"You had your welcome a great while since, and you know very well that it was for once and always," he called after her, as she ran laughing down the hall.

"What an exquisitely pretty creature she is!" Georgia involuntarily exclaimed as they stood looking after her.

"Yes," Bourke answered, adding, in the same breath, "Did you notice my two dogs, Miss Grosvenor? Here, Ponto! Hi, Pagan! come and offer your paws in your most gentleman-like fashion."

His hasty dismissal of her friend's name did not please Georgia. While patting the graceful animals, and expressing her admiration of them, she was mentally repeating—

"He will hold thee, when his passion shall have spent its novel force,
Something better than his dog, a little dearer than his horse."

What a fate to befall her bright bewitching Phillis! And it would, if she were to marry this man, Georgia felt sure of that. Then she suddenly remembered the compact she had entered into,—her promise to defer decisions in regard to his character until she should know him better. She had forgotten it already, and she glanced up into his face with a somewhat remorseful consciousness of the fact.

It struck her for the first time how much and how determinedly *she had hitherto underrated his personal appearance.*

Assuredly he had no pretensions to beauty, but the expression of his countenance was singularly frank and pleasant, and the brow and head might have belonged to a person with far higher claims to intellectual superiority than anything short of positive proofs would have inclined Georgia to ascribe to Denis Bourke.

She had seated herself in a low easy-chair to play with the dogs, who met her advances most graciously ; and, after a few words concerning his two pets, and begging her not to let them become troublesome, Bourke turned towards grandma again, and commenced talking about farming-matters, the weather, and other kindred subjects.

It was evident that he did not mean to bore Miss Grosvenor by unnecessary attentions, even while her host, and she reflected with a little compunction that her manner would always have given him reason to suspect that she should appreciate such consideration. But, after all, the whole thing might be her fancy ; perhaps he had turned to grandma to hide a sudden fit of shyness. Because he had shown physical strength and courage on one occasion, for which she had reason to be grateful, and finer perceptions of her sentiments in regard to his relations with Phillis than she would have expected him to display, it was not necessary to prove her gratitude or express her contrition by going to the opposite extreme and endowing him with mental refinement and a power of subtile insight lacking in plenty of clever men accustomed to a sphere of life very different from any which Denis Bourke could have known.

So she put aside her self-reproaches, and began to listen again to the conversation between grandma and the young man. He was telling a story,—telling it very well, too, Georgia noticed, until he perceived that she had become his auditor also ; then a certain dramatic element he had thrown into his narrative died out, and the closing portion was given rather tamely, he glancing towards her now and then, not so much with the air of wishing to include her as a listener, as if to see whether she were inclined to be a severe critic.

Presently Georgia rose and strolled through the corridor, looking at some prints which hung on the walls,—good ones, too,—and she marvelled if he could have chosen them. *At last she came upon an engraving which her practised eye re-*

cognized as a Gainsborough, and stood quite confounded at the idea of finding such a treasure in a Pennsylvania farmhouse. Probably its possessor had not the slightest idea of its value, but the wonder was, where he could have picked it up. There must be a story connected with that portrait of some long dead and beautiful woman; it must have found its way across seas years before, brought, perhaps, by a lineal descendant of the superb patrician creature, and the changes of fortune had flung it into the hands of the print-dealers.

Though that could hardly be, either, since such persons would have known its worth, and would have demanded a price as much beyond the reach of Denis Bourke's purse as the engraving itself was beyond his appreciation,—cultivated appreciation, Georgia meant, for the attaining which his life could have offered no opportunities. Then she recollected what grandma had told her about the former owner of the house; the print had probably been disregarded or forgotten by his heirs, and Bourke had inherited it.

Just as she reached this satisfactory conclusion, Phillis peeped in through the glass door which opened upon the lawn and garden at the back of the house, glanced towards her grandmother and Bourke engaged in conversation, and called to Georgia to come and join her.

Three stately stone-pine-trees stood in the centre of the grass-plot, and beneath them were arranged some rustic chairs and a table. Beyond, reaching to the brow of the hill, from whence a zigzag path led down to the lake, spread an extensive garden bright with flowers. To the right of the veranda was a long trellis, covered with grape-vines which hid the kitchen; farther down there were some bee-hives, then came a dovecote, the whole as pretty and tasteful as if the owner of the place had been a poet instead of a farmer.

The view of the valley and mountains was glorious, but Georgia had learned to expect that at every point of sight in this picturesque region. Just now, admirer of nature though she was, her thoughts were occupied with her new and inconsistent speculations concerning the man who had chosen this lovely retreat for his home, though, after all, she quickly told herself, it might have been merely the moderate terms offered, not its beauty, which had attracted him.

However, her curiosity was so strongly excited that she

could not forbear a few questions, even at the risk of exposing herself to Phillis French's merciless raillery by again breaking through her rule of behaving as if she never recollected the existence of Denis Bourke, unless he happened to be present.

"I suppose Mr. Bourke is an American by birth, in spite of his Irish name?" said Georgia, with a little yawn.

"Mr. Bourke was born in Italy," replied Phillis, yawning too; but her answer astounded Georgia too much for her to notice the mimicry.

"Why, P. French, you never told me that!" she cried.

"You never asked me," said Phillis.

"But how long has he been in this country?"

"Seven years; no, six years, eight months, and some days."

By the tone of Phillis's voice Georgia knew that the girl was in one of her teasing moods, and perceived, too, that she was herself in a mood to be teased. She preferred to let her curiosity remain ungratified rather than afford Phillis an opportunity for mischievous exultation at her suddenly regarding Denis Bourke of sufficient consequence to institute inquiries about. She would ask nothing more.

"This place is almost as pretty as your Nest," said she; "only it is not so bright and cheerful."

"It would be if I lived in it," returned Phillis. "That careless fellow has dropped a book on the grass; the dew will begin to fall presently and ruin it."

She stooped under the table and picked up the volume.

"Spinoza, in the original Latin," she continued, glancing at the title. "You see, Master Denis has got beyond the horn-book in his reading; you'd hardly have believed it, would you?"

"I never thought about the matter," said Georgia.

Phillis treated her to one of her mocking peals of laughter, opened the book at the fly-leaf, and held it before Miss Grosvenor's eyes. On the page was written Bourke's name, below it a date of a number of years back, with the word Cambridge attached.

"You see, there is the aristocratic O' to help him on towards respectability, though one makes no distinction between his cognomen and vulgar Burke in pronouncing it," said Phillis. "Only think how much nicer I should have been if I *were entitled to dignify French with a second f!*"

It was the first time Phillis had betrayed her perception of certain unrepugnant weaknesses in regard to birth and station which Georgia was quite aware of possessing, but of which somehow, at this instant, she felt a little ashamed.

The approach of Denis Bourke himself relieved her from the necessity of finding a reply.

"Patrick has ordered me to bring you in to supper," said he; "and I am sure grandma is tired and wants a cup of tea."

As they were passing through the hall, Georgia paused to glance again at the print which had attracted her attention.

"I think you will own you scarcely ever saw a better Gainsborough, Miss Grosvenor?" said Bourke.

"Never," she remarked, but saw Phillis regarding her with such mischievous consciousness of the series of astonishments of which she had been the subject since entering the house, that she would not ask a single question.

Bourke ushered them into a long, low room, where the supper-table was spread and grandma already seated.

"Patrick said I was to sit here," she observed, "and he would not hear of my standing up till you came in."

"I should think not," said Bourke.

The exquisite whiteness of the linen, and the appetizing appearance of the viands, did not surprise Miss Grosvenor. Phillis had often praised to her the talents of Bourke's cook and housekeeper; but she could hardly credit Mistress Tabitha with the arrangement of the flowers, or with the taste which had presided over the furnishing of the apartment. While wondering if she must attribute these details to Mr. Bourke's unaided skill, she saw an old man, who might have just stepped out of one of Cruikshank's illustrations of Irish characters, place before Phillis a huge silver tray, whereon stood an urn and other articles of plate, which she perceived must date back at least a century, and were decorated with a crest.

The servant set his burden down, surveyed the group with an air of pride, and said to Phillis, in a perfectly audible whisper,—

"I've brought out the tay-pot and all the accessories, Miss Phaylis. An Misther Dinis had his way, they'd stop in a bog till they was black as my boot, savin' your priseness; but what's the good of me breaking me hand wid rubbin' them bright,

av we're not to show the town lady what we was born and bred to, an we do live in a Yankee farm-house, and—"

"Where are the waffles, Patrick?" called Bourke, breaking in upon his confidences.

"I'm afther bringin' them, sir," replied Patrick, and retired with great dignity.

His disappearance afforded Phillis an opportunity to laugh, and the rest joined in her merriment.

"I don't wonder Patrick is proud of his silver," said Georgia. "That urn is a marvel, and the chasing on the salver perfectly exquisite."

Bourke returned some slight answer, and began to devote himself to grandma's comfort; but it was plain that he felt annoyed. Of course the old servant's remark could not have displeased him; so it must be that he did not like this producing articles which were certainly out of keeping with his present mode of life. When or where they could have been appropriate Georgia found herself marvelling, even while listening and replying to Phillis French's brilliant sallies, that young lady having begun to talk very fast upon the first subject she could seize hold of.

Somehow it was a comfort to Georgia, as the meal went on, to observe that Patrick performed his service in a very reckless and Hibernian fashion, fraught with peril to the dishes and the attire of the guests. Georgia had the grace to feel ashamed of the sensation which she knew arose from a fear of having to consider Denis Bourke as a hero of romance, accompanied by the traditional treasure of an old family servitor who had clung to his fallen fortunes, but her shame did not hinder her satisfaction. And, after all, the possession of a quantity of antique silver did not necessarily argue lofty descent on the part of its owner. There was plenty such to be bought: The most natural conclusion seemed that Denis Bourke possessed more money than she had supposed.

Georgia, like everybody else, good and noble as were many of her qualities, was unwilling to relinquish her prejudices. In order to do so, she must admit that her perspicacity had signally failed for once, and, though theoretically we know and own that it is well for self to be humbled, the practical endurance thereof is highly unpleasant. But Georgia had *more of the humbling process to undergo before the visit*

ended. After supper they went into the apartments on the opposite side of the hall.

"This is my favorite den, Miss Grosvenor," said Bourke; "you'll be shocked at its heterogenous appearance, but a bachelor has no need of a drawing-room."

The use of that one word revealed a good deal to Georgia. Eight Americans out of ten would have said "parlor." She must have had opportunities to notice scores of similar slight, yet convincing, evidences of his foreign education, yet had remained blind thereto. And she had always so hugely prided herself on an ability to decide, after a very brief conversation, upon the social status and early associations of the people she encountered, no matter what their surroundings might be; as proud of her readiness to recognize a gentleman or lady, though in a hood, as of her quickness to detect the coarse native metal under all the plating which years of wealth or power had given the dweller in a palace.

The furniture in the room was of the simplest description. The chairs and lounges were either of wicker or covered with chintz, but the colors in keeping; the general effect harmonious, picturesque even. There were books, stags' heads, more prints, photographs, and one portrait, that of a very beautiful woman, bearing a certain family likeness to the Gainsborough in the hall.

"Whom does that resemble?" Phillis asked, coming behind Georgia, as she stood looking at the picture.

"No one I ever saw. It reminds me of the print."

"The print was the likeness of Denis Bourke's great-aunt, and this is the portrait of his mother," said Phillis. Then she called, "Mr. Bourke, whom is this portrait like?"

"Like Miss Grosvenor," he answered; "I told you so the other day."

"I don't know where you find the resemblance," said Georgia.

"Now, don't say you don't know you are handsome!" cried Phillis, stamping her foot.

"I do know that people call me so," replied Georgia, composedly; "but the features in that picture are exquisitely regular, and mine are the contrary."

"But it does look like you," said Mrs. Davis. "It is the *expression of the eyes*, I think."

To end the discussion, Georgia spoke of a photograph of a fine old castle which hung near.

"What place is that, Mr. Bourke?" she asked.

"It's a house in Ireland," he answered.

"It's his uncle's place, where Mither Dinis lived when he was a bye," added Phillis, mimicking old Patrick's voice and accent.

Georgia had undergone surprises enough for one evening; she rejoiced when grandma announced that it was time to drive homewards.

Just before separating for the night, Phillis said, "Well, Georgina, Georgette! for the third time, What do you think of my neighbor? He was born in Naples, he grew up in an Irish castle, he was educated at Cambridge, and he is a farmer in Pennsylvania."

"And the fact that he is so, hinders even the respect which one might feel for him if he had been a poor, friendless boy, who had managed to become educated and decently well off through his own exertions," Georgia replied, unhesitatingly, and with cold severity, just as you or I would. Miss Grosvenor wanted to have her revenge on Denis Bourke, because she discovered that her first judgment in regard to him had been a proof of her own blindness.

"Dear me!" cried Phillis. "Explain yourself, G. G.!"

"The fact that, with fair talents, good birth, health, and a classical education, he can settle down contentedly to a narrow, aimless life, instead of making for himself a useful and honorable career, is a convincing proof that he has either forfeited his rightful station by misconduct, or is hopelessly and wickedly indolent."

"Clear, precise, and covers the whole ground!" returned Phillis, in high delight. "My dear, you are adorable! Dr. Johnson liked a good hater. I like a person who can stick to prejudices. You show positive genius in finding so quickly new and solid ground to sustain yours. Most people would have been a little stunned by having the old supports so suddenly knocked away; but not you! Good-night, fair charmer; pleasant dreams!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE next day Denis Bourke called at the house on his way to the Corners, as the little group of houses beyond the railway-station was called, though its possession of several shops, a post-office, and a church might have entitled it to a more ambitious name, had the inhabitants been as careful of their dignity as the population of an American hamlet ordinarily is.

Bourke declared himself in a great hurry, but, notwithstanding this statement, he sat for some time in the porch with the three ladies, though he could not have pleaded the excuse that the conversation, pleasant as it was, lulled him into forgetfulness of his duties, for Phillis more than once reminded him thereof with good-natured malice.

Grandma was knitting, as usual; Miss Grosvenor was busy finishing up a sketch; and Phillis, for a wonder, was sitting with folded hands; but as she had been on her feet since five o'clock, and it was now late in the afternoon, the most strenuous partisan of industry might have considered her idleness excusable.

One of Georgia's grievances against Denis Bourke was his being so literal and matter-of-fact. It had not yet occurred to her that she laid herself open to the charge of inconsistency by bestowing so much thought even of a disparaging nature upon a person whom, either on one ground or another, she elected to regard as insignificant, always excepting the possible chance of his fastening Phillis's whole future down to the level of his work-a-day existence. But, whatever foundation there might be for her strictures, he certainly possessed imagination enough to appreciate the pretty picture which met his eyes as he walked up the path and saw the group in the veranda.

The great masses of blossoming woodbine cast a dense shade, and in the soft gloom he saw grandma in her Quaker-colored draperies and close white cap, looking like an image of peace and rest, beautiful with that beauty of old age which *is so touching*, Miss Grosvenor, handsomer than he had ever

seen her, from the flush in her cheeks, and Phillis, a model of lazy—or, more correctly, tired—grace.

"I hope your visit did not fatigue you, Miss Grosvenor?" Denis said, after he had greeted grandma with the respectful affection he always showed her.

"Thanks; I enjoyed it too much for that," Georgia answered, bestowing a smile upon him,—a mark of favor she had seldom vouchsafed hitherto, as Phillis reflected when she caught it and wondered if Denis noticed the change. A rapid glance at his face showed her that he had.

Presently Cinders called her young mistress away; grandma fell into a doze over her knitting, and Miss Grosvenor and Bourke were left to their own devices. A week ago he would have got up and taken his leave, and she would have expected him to, but he kept his seat now, and she could not regard his doing so in the light of a liberty, as she most certainly would have done in the earlier days of her visit.

She felt a strong desire to know what chain of circumstances could have led him to choose this mountain-retreat for his residence, and how it happened that, reared and educated as he had been, he should have settled down into his present occupation. It was useless, she had discovered, to question Phillis French; either the young lady knew nothing about the reasons, or else she chose to punish Georgia for her previous slighting disregard of Bourke, by appearing unconscious of her curiosity, or by giving replies as void of tangible significance as if she had been a Delphic oracle.

Some remark he offered gave Georgia an opening to observe,—

"Miss French tells me you were born in Italy."

"In Naples," he replied; "but the fact has not made me very Italian, you perceive. I lived there till I was about six. One of the first things I remember is nearly getting drowned in the bay at Sorrento."

"Association would have rendered it more poetical than the same risk over at Podgers's Pond?" said she.

"Yes, I suppose so," he replied, hesitatingly, evidently trying to trace what comparison personal to him was implied. Then he added, in his matter-of-fact way, "But the thing itself would be the same, you see."

He had no imagination, this man. Somehow, his lack in

this particular exasperated Georgia as sorely as if it were owing to his own fault.

"The pretty Southern accent must have been your earliest language," she remarked.

"Yes; but I can't talk it now; I have no gift in the way of foreign tongues,—in speaking them, I mean. I hate Italy! I was back there some six years ago, but I only went because I was obliged to."

A man who hated Italy, and, worse than all, avowed the enormity with a kind of savage satisfaction,—oh, he certainly deserved to pass his life toiling on a farm! Podgers's Pond was a fitting appellation for a sheet of water that he looked out over daily; it was only a pity that the little lake had not been as prosaic as its name! But he should not drag Phillis down to his level; some means of hindering that should be found; though what special destiny Georgia expected to procure for her friend, if she disturbed the apparently very natural course of present events, did not appear, nor did she stop to be practical enough to consider.

"I suppose you think me a heathen?" he added, presently, still with the air of turning something over in his mind.

"You must not blame me," she said, laughing; "to each his taste. I like Italy, you prefer Podgers's Pond."

"You will admit that, in its way, nothing could be prettier?"

"Oh, it is very pretty."

"Then I see it is the name you quarrel with. But if one were to follow out that theory, it would be impossible for a man to write poetry just because he was called Stokes."

Georgia saw she had no argument, but the consciousness only deepened her wish to make him comprehend that an educated man who could spend his youth as he was doing merited no mercy,—a desire incompatible with her decision that the fact of his choosing such a life became proof positive that he was fit for nothing better.

Bourke continued pulling his moustache with a reflective air; suddenly he said,—

"I have got it at last! I am such a slow fellow, it always takes me a good while to follow you and P. French."

"Well?" questioned Georgia, curious to discover if he really had traced her thought.

"I couldn't think what you meant about the Bay of Naples and Podgers's Pond! It's my being willing to live in this out-of-the-way place that you are wondering over?"

He had fathomed her meaning. Now Georgia felt a little ashamed,—felt almost that she had been rude.

"I fear you cannot find it a very satisfactory sort of life," she said, rather commiseratingly, by way of making amends.

He began to laugh.

"I like it immensely," he said; "so does P. French! You see, Miss Grosvenor, there's nothing like having plenty of work to keep the cobwebs out of one's brains."

"There are a great many different kinds of work, however," she answered, a little dryly, amazed by his including Phillis's contentment with his own.

"But they all bring about pretty much the same result, so far as one's feelings are concerned," said he.

"That is scarcely the received opinion," she replied. "Mere physical labor must have a very different effect on the mind from some intellectual pursuit which would occupy all its faculties."

"That would depend on the man's mental culture, and the spirit in which the work was done," said he, calmly.

Georgia began really to grow interested now.

"I don't understand," she said.

"And I'm such a clumsy talker that perhaps I can't explain what I mean. But you will admit that Burns wrote real poetry while he was ploughing his fields?"

"Oh, if a man is a poet!" she exclaimed, and heard plainly how ill-natured and unjust the scornful remark sounded.

"Or is educated, and able to appreciate poetry, he can find a good deal in his farming," said Bourke. "At least we have Horace's verdict therefor," he added, laughing again.

"Ah, but Horace chose his farm as a rest after intellectual labors which had given him fame and affluence," returned Georgia.

"But if he had chosen it before, he need not necessarily have been a clod because he was a farmer."

"I did not mean to say that. But I suppose you will own that writing books is a less prosaic business than hoeing corn?"

"All work is prosaic, regarded from one side,—real work. *Do you think that Walter Scott got much mental satisfaction*

out of all those books written in his later life,—toiling against time, under the pressure of debts, conscious that he was falling below the level of his former efforts,—as tired, physically, as any laborer that ever carried a hod, besides the fatigue of mind?"

"Still, the consciousness of what he had done,—of his fame."

"The fame must have been a very poor satisfaction, then. But take lesser examples,—the men who toil and do not win eminence in their professions; the novel-writers, who just earn money enough to put bread into their children's mouths; the lawyers who fail to reach the woolsack; the politicians who never succeed,—don't you think the poetry must vanish out of their thoughts by forty?"

"Evidently you consider ambition a poor affair."

"No; it is only that I do not see it need necessarily take the shape of wanting to make a noise in the world."

"But a young man ought to have such faith in himself that he believes it is his place to lead men,—to become a power," cried Georgia.

"Remember how many must stop in the rut, else there would be nobody enough in advance to lead. All I said was, that to the men who do not attain eminence in what are called intellectual pursuits, life must grow as prosaic as to the tiller of the ground,—harder, because of the disappointments brought by lack of success."

"But to live out of the world, among ignorant people."

"One need not nowadays. In this retired region you will meet as many well-educated persons as in the same sized circle elsewhere; not with fashionable manners, maybe—but who that goes in what is called fashionable society does not rail against its vacuity? As for the famous people—well, their biographies show us that often their companionship could not have been very pleasant to their families. A man may possess the faculty of pouring out wonderful verse, and yet live a most unpoetical life,—be a sot, a brute, and a bad man in every way."

"Oh, poets are of course exceptions to general rules," said Georgia, and knew this remark was feebler than her first, but could think of no other. She was astounded at this new phase in which Bourke was presenting himself.

"*They ought not to be.* Those who show what are called

the eccentricities of genius only prove that their genius is incomplete ; it looks oftener like a disease than anything else."

"Well, put the poets aside. Do you mean to tell me that a man ought not to aspire,—ought not to desire position, celebrity?"

"I mean to say that I think the man who sets out simply to attain that end is actuated by a very petty, selfish motive."

"But some achievement he must have in view,—I mean, some noble aim."

"I agree with you ; but what I maintain is that any work well done is noble,—that a life is not necessarily barren of fruits because it is quiet,—that the desire to rush out into the world and cause a stir is no proof of intellectual superiority. The fact is, as education becomes general, the great difference in intellect disappears,—will do so more and more."

"Oh!" exclaimed Georgia, aghast.

"You don't believe it! Take one instance. Fifty years ago a woman who could write a good novel was a wonder ; to-day hundreds can do it, and there are thousands quite as capable, if they chose to turn their energies in that direction."

"According to your theory, in a few centuries more everybody might be a Shakespeare, or a Newton, or a Mrs. Browning."

"At all events, general mental activity would reach such a level growth that no man could stand out among his fellows as Shakespeare did among his."

"Good gracious! do you bestow the creative faculty upon every human being?"

"Yes, I believe it is present in some form. The thing is, that now we only recognize it as such when it takes certain shapes. When mankind reaches a higher point of knowledge, there will be no little and no great, because there can be nothing insignificant as we get towards perfection ; that is, the full development of all our faculties, and the right use thereof."

"Oh, according to that, the time will come when a milliner who makes a perfect bonnet will be considered a poet just as much as if she had written a poem."

"Every human achievement ought to be a poem. Whether the making the bonnet was such would depend on the *woman's mental cultivation*. It all depends on the mind

we bring into the work. You may put what Newton did into the blowing of soap-bubbles. Don't you see?"

"I believe I follow you, but I am rather dazed! So you think that a cultivated woman ought to be quite content to make bonnets?"

"Why not! She is doing a necessary work, and when the world gets civilized enough to make education the ground of social distinction, she will have no call to dislike her occupation. It is not in reality physical labor that humanity girds against, it is the fact that it puts a man low in the social scale."

"I never thought of it in that way; yes, perhaps it is so."

"If one could fancy the world at that stage when all people were really educated, a carpenter's shop could be just as agreeable a place, even intellectually, as any other room in which cultivated persons were gathered."

"But the means of educating them all?"

"Ah, we must go on to the general brotherhood idea for that. When a man must employ his wealth merely as a means for the general good,—when he who strives from any other motive is a monster,—then the world will see all those fine things."

"An intellectual millennium," said Georgia.

"Just so! What is called the Christian religion has ruled the civilized world for eighteen hundred years, and has never yet been put into practice; it never will be, until that day comes."

He stopped, and laughed again.

"I need not talk you deaf," said he; "and, after all, my theories won't convince you that a man is not lacking in ambition or energy when he tills a farm."

"Hardly, if he does it from choice."

"Yet you would admit that one of these great English land-owners is not wasting his life if he attends to his duties."

"Oh, the case is so different. Look at such a man's responsibilities,—his influence,—the good he can do to hundreds."

"Then it would not be worth while to do good to a few people? The influence would have no value, because confined to a narrow circle."

At this moment Phillis French's voice sounded in the hall. "There!" cried Bourke. "Would she be happier with nothing to do? A waste of life, you think. She has time to read; she has interests; the neighborhood affords her a half-dozen acquaintances with whom she has intellectual sympathies: how many more could she find if she were a great heiress in New York, or the wife of a rich English land-owner?"

Phillis appeared at the instant and glanced rather curiously at the pair. Bourke was flushed and excited; Georgia looked perplexed.

"Hum!" thought Phillis. "If G. G. has reached a point where she condescends to quarrel with him, their acquaintance is flourishing famously. Some fine day Miss Georgia will be as much astonished as Jonah was when he discovered that his gourd had grown into a tree."

"You see I am still inflicting myself upon Miss Grosvenor," said Bourke.

"I am glad you stopped. I want you to come and tell me if a horrid kind of beast that has appeared among my cabbages is likely to do them harm! it's as big as my little-finger-nail, and there are such lots of the creatures. Come too, G. G., and I'll give you some of my best roses as we go through the garden."

"You see, Miss Grosvenor—*dulci cum utile!*" laughed Bourke.

"I do believe I have been asleep!" exclaimed grandma, opening her eyes very wide, and looking round in astonishment.

CHAPTER VII.

Two days passed without Denis Bourke's making his appearance at the Nest,—a circumstance which greatly surprised Miss Grosvenor. Phillis did not remark upon his absence, and Georgia wondered whether her silence rose from indifference, or from a fear of betraying a suspicious interest in his movements.

"What has become of your neighbor?" she asked, at length.

"It is my belief he has lost himself under a cabbage-leaf," Phillis replied. "I have always warned him that such would be his fate. Did you quarrel with him the other day, G. G.?"

"Our acquaintance is rather too recent for such a catastrophe to arrive," returned Georgia.

"Oh, is it contrary to etiquette to quarrel with people until you know them well?" Phillis demanded, with the serious air of a person desiring information upon some very important subject.

"Don't rush into one of your exasperating moods, miss," retorted Georgia.

Whereupon Phillis chuckled,—not as grown-up people do, but exactly like a year-old baby just learning how to get into mischief.

"Of course there was a time when I could not have ventured to hint that anything would induce your highness to do him that honor," she continued; "but I suppose you might now, since he has revealed that he was born in a castle instead of a cabin,—or would have been, if he had happened to be at home when the interesting event took place."

"As you are not Irish, you need not make bulls," said Georgia.

"But did you quarrel?" Phillis persisted. "He looked very red when I interrupted your conversation, and you were knitting your brows portentously."

"I was doing nothing of the sort. I told you what we were talking about."

"Oh, yes, my dear, and I often tell you what I've been talking about, and show my powers of invention in so doing."

"P. French, I warn you that presently I shall pull your hair-pins out and let your hair down. That is the only threat, I find, which keeps you in order: it is too much for your patience to think of arranging all that mass twice in a morning."

"Is that spoiled child of mine worrying you, Miss Grosvenor?" asked grandma, from her easy-chair in the window.

"As usual! But, grandma dear, I'll not have you call me by that ceremonious name; you promised not to do it."

"Then I won't again."

"Grandma's good at promises: she inherits the faculty from me," said Phillis, playfully, giving Georgia an affectionate smile at the same time, for her new friend's sweet at-

tentions to the old lady had done more to win Phillis's regard than her beauty and elegance, potent as those spells had proved upon the imaginative girl.

"What has become of Denis Bourke?" asked grandma. "He wasn't here yesterday, and has not been to-day."

"I suppose at this moment he is hunting a rope wherewith to hang himself," Phillis answered promptly. "Georgia quarrelled with the unfortunate young man, and forced me to forbid him the house."

"What a story-telling goose you are!" cried Georgia.

"Oh, relieve your conscience by calling me bad names, if you choose. I am a patient creature, and can bear a great deal," said Phillis. "Sooner or later the consequences of your ill treatment will prove fatal; but go on, young woman, go on."

She sank into a chair, and presented an image of such woe-begone wretchedness that grandma and Georgia laughed heartily, as even much graver persons would have been forced to do.

"Poor old Ferguson, or some other of his workmen, must be ill," grandma observed, as soon as she had recovered her gravity. "If that is the case, you may be sure Denis is doing the man's duty in the daytime and taking care of him at night. A kinder-hearted creature never lived: he never thinks of personal trouble, if there is anything he can do for those about him."

"Which proves him a very weak-minded young person. He would not at all answer for the hero of one of those fashionable novels you and G. G. are so fond of reading," rejoined Phyllis.

"We have a work of that description to finish at present," said Georgia: "so you may either sit quiet or go about your own affairs."

"I prefer the latter alternative," replied Phyllis; "or, if I don't, I must accept it. You two idle people delude me into wasting a great deal of time."

"I wish we could," said her grandmother; "or at least induce you to sit still occasionally."

"These are the temptings of Satan!" cried Phillis.

"Just wait and hear the next chapter," pleaded Georgia, taking a book off the table. "There is the nicest description

of a woman, bearing up nobly under terrible suspense, that I have read for an age."

"I hate such descriptions! I believe it is wicked to write them!" exclaimed Phillis, with one of the outbursts of violence wherewith she sometimes astounded Georgia. Then she began to laugh; her face cleared as suddenly as it had clouded over, and she added, gayly,—“Besides, I read the chapter last night after you were both asleep, into the bargain. Old Elder Stowe is coming to buy two of my pigs, and I must be in a practical frame of mind, else I sha'n't cheat him as much as I ought, and shall have regrets afterwards. Farewell, my children! This is the Duchess of Cotor receiving her guests."

She caught up a shawl which lay on a chair, draped it about her in a train, and stood a caricature of a fine-lady affectation and insolent pride. In another moment the shawl was folded tight across her shoulders, her hair pushed back, her forehead puckered into scores of wrinkles, until she became an image of severity and petty care.

"The New England spinster preparing to drive a hard bargain," she announced, though the excellence of the acting rendered the explanation unnecessary. "Polly, the milk-maid!" she called out, and there stood an awkward, puffy-cheeked country lass, grinning and dropping courtesies. "Horoo!" she cried, and dashed into an Irish jig. "Show is over!" was the next exclamation, then she disappeared.

Grandma had been laughing, but, as the door closed, Georgia saw her shake her head,—caught a deep sigh too.

"She is the cleverest gypsy alive!" cried Miss Grosvenor.

"I hope she is a happy one," returned the old lady.

"And do you fear she is not?" asked Georgia.

"I don't know," replied grandma, sadly. Miss Grosvenor longed to put further questions, but, while meditating whether she might venture to do so, Mrs. Davis looked up, and said, in her usual cheerful voice, "My dear, shall we go on with our chapter?"

Georgia opened the book, and began to read, but, interesting as the story was, her thoughts wandered somewhat. She could not avoid the reflection that Phillis French and her grandmother were the most reticent women she had ever known, and, in spite of their frank good-nature and sim-

plicity, the least accessible to question upon any matter personal to themselves.

That evening, after tea, the two girls walked to the lake, and, while they were resting on a fallen tree-trunk, old Patrick appeared along the winding path which skirted the water and led over the hill to the Den.

When he drew near the ladies, he stopped and took off his hat; his long white hair fluttered in the breeze, and he looked a very picturesque object as he stood leaning on his staff.

"Good-evening, Patrick," they called at the same instant.

"The hoighth of the finest to ye both, and sure the best wadn't be as good as ye deserve," returned Patrick. "Av I was at home in the ould counthry, it's two quanes of fairies I'd have taken yez for, inthirely."

"We are too thorough republicans to accept queenship even in fairy-land, Patrick," said Phillis.

"Troth, Miss Phaylis, av ye'll excuse the liberty, ye can't help quaning it over the young gentlemen's harrits," replied the old man readily.

"And, talking of young gentlemen, what has become of Mr. Bourke?" asked Phillis.

"Ah, now, Miss Phaylis dear, his not razionable, isn't Mither Dinis, and that's the thruth!" Patrick exclaimed, in accents as reproachful as if laying his young master's faults at the door of the person he addressed.

"You would be furious, Patrick, if anybody else said that."

"Faith, why wudn't I? Many's the time I've dandled him on my knees when he warn't the hoighth of a blade o' corn; all the more rason, av coorse, why I'd not hear him spoke agin! But av ye'd say a word yoursilf, Miss Phaylis, or pershuade her leddyship here to shpake, it might have more effect than comin' from mesel' that his heerd talk iver since he can remimber, and afore it, on the top of that."

"But what dreadful thing is he doing, Patrick? Don't be so mysterious; you quite frighten me."

"Mysterious, is it? Faix, no! He's just wearin' his hairt out a-watchin' wid ould Ferguson the night, and an extra hand wanted in the fields, and not wan to be got for love or money, and him taking the place, and payin' Ferguson his wage all the same as av he was there himsel', instead of *lyin' in his bed* groanin' with rheumatiz, which he richly

deserves, for he laughed in my face when I told him of a remedy that come down to me from my grandmother, rest her soul, that's been dead since I was in the cradle."

Patrick paused to breathe and wipe his head with a light yellow handkerchief, and Phillis took this opportunity to whisper in Georgia's ear,—

"I said this morning that poor Denis wouldn't answer for the hero of a fashionable novel. I'm afraid, in spite of the castle, we can't even call him a gentleman. Who ever knew of a gentleman taking care of a sick man at night and working all day in the place of one of his own laborers? He really must have been born in the attics, or on the roof,—certainly not anywhere near the state apartments."

"Don't you think you are rather silly?" asked Georgia, in a tone as dispassionate as if proposing some question of a nature so purely abstract that neither her listener nor herself could have any personal interest therein.

"Oh, dear, no; nor do you, for that matter!" Phillis replied, with one of her baby chuckles, then turned to the old man again. "So poor Ferguson is very ill?"

"It's the pain that's desthryin' him," Patrick explained; "what he calls rheumatiz fayver; but he'll be gettin' betther soon."

"If not, Mr. Bourke must be relieved from sitting up at night," said Phillis.

"It's like yerself to think o' that, Miss Phaylis!" returned Patrick, admiringly. "Ferguson's wife is a wakely craythur, and he needs a power o' rubbin', his very onraysinable, is Ferguson."

"You can't expect him to be very reasonable when he has rheumatic fever," said Phillis, laughing.

"Mibby not," Patrick admitted, but with slight cordiality. It was plain that he found it difficult to forgive Ferguson for causing Mr. Bourke so much trouble.

The next day was Sunday, and in the evening Bourke appeared at the Nest, looking more sunburned than usual, and somewhat tired, but in excellent spirits, and submitting with perfect good humor to Phillis French's unmerciful railery upon what she termed his efforts to enact Don Quixote deprived of any portion of romance, even of any romantic sentiments on his own part.

Georgia could not help feeling that Phillis's remarks were meant to satirize her strictures upon the young man's ability to content himself with the existence he led, rather than to express condemnation of his pursuits and theories. But she wisely decided to enter into no explanations with her friend, for her own ideas, presented in this changed dress, looked so petty and circumscribed that, for the time, she felt ashamed of them.

All the same she did not propose to be convinced, either by Bourke's argument or by any ridiculous turn which Phillis might give to her class prejudices. The life Bourke had adopted was unfitted to a man whose birth and education qualified him for a very different career, and she assured herself that judgment upon him could not assume too severe a form. -He must certainly be utterly destitute of ambition, and the lack was more unpardonable than would have been an excess equal to that which influenced Macbeth.

But, in spite of her determination to look down upon Denis Bourke, the days which succeeded passed very pleasantly, and his efforts had so much to do therewith that she found it difficult to keep her resolve as active as she intended.

Apparently it had been possible to supply the sick laborer's place, as Mr. Bourke found a good deal of leisure, which he devoted to the service or amusement of the ladies at the Nest, though he did not do this until he had quietly forced Miss Grosvenor to show that, so far from resenting or being bored by his visits, she was quite ready to accept her share of his society, and to like it.

Phillis made it evident that she wished to give Georgia every opportunity for becoming really well acquainted with their neighbor, and Miss Grosvenor asked herself if this was because the girl had an attachment for him and wanted her to reach a stand-point at which her verdict would be favorable.

Of course Georgia had been obliged to relinquish her first idea, that such an attachment on her friend's part must reduce her future to a very muddy level indeed; this could only endure while persisting in the idea that the man was low-born and imperfectly educated; but she held fast to her theory that for Phillis's whole life to pass in this retired place, and in the midst of her present occupations, would be a sacrifice of the *brilliant creature too dreadful to contemplate.*

Georgia decided that her duty in the case was plain; to open Phillis's eyes to a proper appreciation of her own talents, and a conception of the future, which her varied gifts and charms would entitle her to expect, and, at the same time, to rouse in her a desire to attain such elevation. As the natural sequence of this view came a second thought: where was the prince or hero to come from, who should take Phillis by the hand and lead her forward and upward? As yet Denis Bourke was the only approach to such a personage visible upon the horizon; indeed, he was not even that, only a substitute, and a very unsatisfactory one, since he seemed to have no idea even of trying to raise his own existence higher in the social scale.

So it was plain also to Georgia that her duty extended to the point of constituting herself an apostle, or, so to speak, the Egeria (of course with no feminine weakness) for this misguided young man, to plant in him the seeds of dormant ambition, waken discontent with his present aims, or lack of them, and make him eager to lift himself out of obscurity.

All the same, as the days went on, Georgia had to admit (much against her will) that nothing could be less prosaic and commonplace than this obscure existence as Phillis and Bourke lived it, to watch which was more like dreaming over a bucolic idyl than anything else; and she found it very pleasant, and restful also, to accept her actual share in the life.

But this could only last for a time, and so it ought to be with them,—must be, Georgia declared resolutely. Bourke must achieve fortune and position. Phillis must have her rightful place in the world. Miss Grosvenor entirely forgot her ordinary opinions—by no means original or uncommon—of the emptiness and hollowness of that world, the unsatisfactory results which ambition brought. Phillis must be taught to plume her wings, and Denis Bourke roused out of his lethargy; yes, her duty was plain.

But the weather was so warm, and the rest and peace of the enchanted spot so infectious, that Georgia did not prove as energetic as she had intended, and enjoyed her pastoral as much as if she had really been a shepherdess,—but a shepherdess in a Watteau gown, and with no necessity for *running after the sheep*.

CHAPTER VIII.

GEORGIA GROSVENOR was a very astonished young woman when she woke up to the fact that she had been two months in the retreat which she had termed her Happy Valley. Nothing save an enumeration of dates would convince her of the truth of this statement, presented in a letter lately received from Aunt Conyngham. But dates are as stubborn as if they were human beings, and the pains she took to prove her relative in error only showed the correctness of the calculation. Georgia had left town before the middle of May, and it was now a fortnight since beautiful June came to an end.

At least she had gained wonderfully in health; the face that looked at her out of her mirror was no longer weary and pale. A slight tint of sunburn freshened it; faint roses blossomed in her cheeks; she could walk several miles without fatigue, and, best of all, her spirits shared in the change, and were pervaded by a sense of peace and repose such as she had never known before.

The world seemed to drift farther and farther off. It might have disappeared from sight altogether, had it not been for Aunt Conyngham's frequent epistles, and for those still pleasanter letters signed with Herbert Caruthers's name.

These latter messages did occasionally remind Georgia that even yet she had not begun the work of contemplation and debate which must be performed; but there was time enough. She had no intention of deserting her retreat until autumn. Useless for Aunt Conyngham to try and inveigle her into the dissipation of Newport. Her first duty was to get entirely well and strong, and she could only do so by remaining where she could have the beneficial effects of bracing mountain-air.

She said and wrote this with a virtuous resolution which must have made any person smile who knew how careless she had always been of any such consideration; but Aunt Conyngham bore the announcement with tolerable patience, for wise Mr. Caruthers had hinted that this prolonged seclusion might prove the most favorable aid possible to their mutual wishes.

Life and the world—as he and his coadjutor comprehended

the terms—would look all the brighter to the young lady after her long months of monotonous existence. Into the bargain, she was beyond the reach of any perilous agencies, such as handsome, eligible, youthful gallants, and showy matrimonial propositions, which might militate against the reasonable and right decision to which both hoped to bring her.

As for Georgia, when she roused herself sufficiently to realize the fulness of her contentment, she was too thoroughly satisfied even to wonder much thereat. Her regard for Phillis French had grown into the warmest affection she had ever felt towards any woman of her own age. Phillis's companionship was a constant delight, and she could not believe that any separating point must sooner or later arrive in their paths which had been so abruptly brought together. Where Georgia's prejudices against Denis Bourke had gone, she could no more have told than she could account for the rapid flight of the past weeks. She had learned thoroughly to appreciate him,—to do full justice to his talents, and find great pleasure in his society, though her very admiration of his mental gifts increased always her dissatisfaction with his life and pursuits.

He had long since grown as much at ease in her presence as he was in that of Phillis French herself; he laughed and jested, and revealed a fund of racy Irish humor somewhat out of keeping with his rather grave exterior. But whenever they were alone, Miss Grosvenor and he speedily got on to serious subjects. She was never tired of combating what she termed his impossible opinions, and he was never at the end of his arguments.

She had visited his farm, time and again, his coal-mine, his "store," and was forced to admit that, so far, the co-operative system on which he conducted matters between himself and his workmen seemed very successful,—as far removed from the vague dreams of a Romney Leigh as they were from the various socialistic associations which have especially chosen America for the field of their failures, in trying to combine incompatible theories into a sound whole capable of practical development. All the same she persisted in considering this course a waste of his powers. A man ought to possess personal ambitions,—to go forth into the great arena and struggle for position, for fame. Theoretically, the idea of a general brotherhood *might be wondrously beautiful*, but the world was

not ready for it by many centuries. So slight an effort on the part of one man to reduce such doctrines to practice was as valueless as attempting to drain the ocean by means of a pint cup.

Nevertheless, his glowing exposition—and he could be very eloquent when excited—gained a strong influence over her imagination and sympathies. Not that she yielded an inch in her strictures against the narrowness and unworthiness of his existence compared with what his talents demanded of him; but the breadth of his views, the nobility of his conceptions, ay, the sacrifices he made, caused that career before the eyes of men, that race for worldly prizes, that strife for worldly crowns, to appear less meritorious and grand.

She was too susceptible not to be deeply affected by the lives he and Phillis French led, whether regarded as the natural result of their characters or as the outgrowth of their strange theories. She saw that neither occupation, nor care for those about them, nor readiness to aid even by the work of their hands all who were poor and needy, impeded their mental progress. There was a constant reaching upwards, an intellectual vitality, just as keen as if they had lived as innocent of bodily toil as a German professor or a famous poetess.

But Georgia, anxious to defer serious thought upon any subject,—telling herself she must allow nothing to disturb the quiet which had done her such good,—meditated little upon this influence, and the radical change in many of her views acquired a deeper hold because it came so gradually as to be insensible.

Late one afternoon the two girls were seated under the maple-trees on the lawn, in lazy enjoyment of the freshness after the noon-day heat, when Denis Bourke appeared, bearing a package of newspapers and letters.

"I found these for you at the post-office," he said, depositing his burden on a chair which stood between them, and resting himself upon a bench opposite. He began to employ his straw hat as a fan, while he watched the pair divide the spoils, too busy for a few instants to bestow any attention upon him after their hastily-uttered thanks; but he seemed very well satisfied to sit there in idle serenity and regard the pretty picture they made.

"*Five letters* and all that printed rubbish for you, G. G.!"

cried Phillis. "It is not fair, Denis Bourke,—only one beggarly epistle as my portion! At all events, here is my 'Farmer's Journal,' so I am provided with sensible reading-matter for the rest of the day."

Bourke laughed scornful uubelief of her sincerity.

"If you are impertinent, I'll make you read the whole paper aloud, even to the advertisements," she said, threateningly; then she turned to Georgia, and added, "Please don't sit there such an image of polite impatience, fumbling your letters. Open them, and be done with it. If they are all marriage proposals, you can recommend me for those you decline."

"I fancy they are innocent of such exciting news," replied Georgia. "This is from my aunt; I'm sure it contains a lecture."

"You might let Miss Phillis inherit that instead of the marriage offer," suggested Bourke.

"Far be it from me to deprive a friend of anything so useful and necessary," cried Phillis. "Go on, G. G. The next."

"From Amy Moreland. I've told you about her. There will be at least eight pages full of her engagement—"

"And her lover's perfections," interrupted Phillis. "Pass! it is too warm for such heroics. If the others are likely to be no more interesting, you may put them in your pocket."

"I think they would not be," said Georgia; but after looking again at the envelopes she observed, "Oh, this is from my brother! Excuse me; I will just see what he says; I have been expecting a letter for some time."

"Don't allow us to interfere with your sisterly affection," laughed Phillis. "Probably he is in a scrape; women's brothers always are."

Georgia opened the epistle, glanced down the page, and exclaimed, joyfully,—

"Why, he is coming home for a few months!"

"I condole with you," said Phillis. "It must be an awful thing to have a brother! The least he can do to show his regret for existing, is to keep out of the way."

"Do you agree with that heretical sentiment, Mr. Bourke?" asked Georgia.

"I never thought about it," he answered; "but I should say *that a brother would be a superfluous luxury.*"

"When is yours coming?" demanded Phillis.

Georgia read on for a moment, and then replied,—

"In a few days. He was to sail almost immediately."

"Oh! he will want you to go away," Phillis exclaimed, in tones of dismay.

"No; he has received the letter I wrote him from here; says he will visit Aunt Conyngham at Newport for a week, and then join me." This suggested a new thought, and she asked, in perplexity, "But what shall I do with him, P. French? You can't take him in?"

"I hope I am capable of taking in any son of Adam that ever existed," returned she; "but in the sense you mean, I can't help. There is no room in the Nest for a male bird."

"And no hotel or possible lodging nearer than Wachuset," said Georgia. "Three miles to come and go each time he visits me."

"He could live on gingerbread at the railroad-station, and sleep in a baggage-car," said P. French, in a matter-of-fact tone, as if uttering a perfectly reasonable and satisfactory proposition.

Georgia and Bourke laughed, and the latter observed,—

"I never happened to hear you mention your brother, Miss Grosvenor."

"She thought the subject would be more interesting to me," said Phillis. "But what will you do with him, G. G.? There's an empty crow's-nest in the old poplar; but perhaps it wouldn't be big enough to hold his lordship."

"My half-brother, Mr. Bourke," Georgia explained.

"And he exults in such a pretty name,—Maurice Peyton," cried Phillis. "Why didn't you come into the world with a fine-sounding appellation, Denis Bourke?"

"Maurice Peyton!" he repeated.

A wasp just then settled on a knot of flowers Georgia wore at her throat, and she and Phillis were so busy inducing the insect to depart without rousing its anger that they did not observe the tone of astonishment in which Bourke uttered the name. His surprise was evidently a pleasant one; for his eyes lighted up, and he smiled to himself while he rose to drive away the wasp, which insisted on circling about Georgia's head in a threatening fashion.

"*I have an idea!*" Bourke said suddenly, after the ill-tem-

pered little yellow-jacket had been convinced that his wisest plan was to go in search of enemies less able to defend themselves. "I have a capital idea!"

Phillis expressed unbounded wonder, by face and gesture, then seized a newspaper, and began to fan Denis, with a comical affectation of fear and pity, which made him and Georgia laugh anew.

"Sit down, young man; sit down," she cried, pleadingly.

"And your capital idea, Mr. Bourke?" demanded Miss Grosvenor.

"Why shouldn't your brother stop with me? There is plenty of room up at the Den, and Tabitha and Patrick will make him tolerably comfortable."

Phillis sank back in her seat with a long-drawn sigh of relief, and closed her eyes, as if weak and faint from the effects of her terrified sympathy.

"You have escaped unharmed this time, Denis Bourke, but don't run such risks often," she said, solemnly.

"It is very, very kind of you, Mr. Bourke," Georgia said, as soon as Phillis's nonsense would let her speak intelligibly. "But are you sure it would not be a trouble?"

"The matter requires no discussion," interrupted Phillis. "Nothing short of an interposition of destiny could have roused Denis Bourke to that inspired pitch. G. G., your relative is disposed of; let your mind be at rest."

"Please consider the thing settled," said Bourke. "I shall like immensely to have a visitor, and I promise that your brother shall have no cause to complain."

"Then he will be unhappy," put in Phillis: "a man without something to grumble about always is."

"I am sure he will find it all charming," said Georgia. "But we must—that is—"

She hesitated; she wanted to explain that pecuniary remuneration must be mentioned; but it seemed difficult to do so. At the same time, she was thinking how completely her opinions in regard to Denis Bourke had changed since she found such explanation difficult.

He relieved her slight embarrassment (which Phillis was silently and highly enjoying, as Georgia might have perceived had she looked towards the mischievous young woman) by saying,—

"If you will give me an address in New York for your brother, Miss Grosvenor, I'll just write to him myself."

"I can't bear any more!" cried Phillis, in a dazed, awe-stricken tone. "Denis Bourke positively offering to write a letter!"

"I am only going to write the address at present," replied Bourke, taking a little note-book and pencil out of his pocket. He wrote down the name of the banker to whom Georgia said her brother would be sure to go the day of his arrival. They sat and talked merry nonsense for a while; then Phillis sent Bourke into the house to persuade grandma to join them, which the old lady consented to, feeling very brisk and talkative after her nap.

She was informed of the news Georgia had received, and beamed with congratulations, which Phillis interspersed with slighting remarks upon men in general, and brothers in particular.

The conversation was interrupted by the loud banging of the gate.

"There comes the boy from the telegraph-office!" cried Phillis. "Oh, Georgia, I am sure your aunt has ordered you home! I detest that woman instinctively. Aunts are worse than brothers!" She hurried forward to meet the approaching Mercury,—a lean, sandy-haired lad of fifteen, much too large for his clothes, and seeming to possess more knees and elbows than by right belonged to him, with an expression of mingled intelligence and love of fun in his countenance which redeemed the plain features. "Perhaps, if you had tried, you might have taken that gate off its hinges, Joe Grimshaw," she said, pretending to frown.

"Jest as easy as winkin', Miss Phillis," returned the youth, with a grin. "But I kinder thought I'd leave it on, else there wouldn't be nothin' to bang another time: and I am a Government officer, I am, and like to denounce my 'rival.'"

"Did you come hoping to steal my harvest apples, Joe Grimshaw?" demanded Phillis, who delighted in the young rascal's readiness.

"Not steal!" he replied, energetically. "I'm a reformed character, Miss French, through and through! I'm thinkin' of goin' to Sunday-school, ef you'll take a class. You see,

there ain't a tree about that's got a n'apple on it this year ; and a fellar's got to find okypation on the Sabba'-day."

"What have you brought, you bad Joe, you?"

"One o' them yaller things."

"Well, give it to me."

"It's for the city gal ; but they hain't spelt her name right. I heerd you call her Miss Grovner, and it's writ Gros-ve-nor."

"Did you never hear of a name being written one way and pronounced another, Joe?"

"No! It ain't according to natur'. If any fellar did it by me, I'd lamm him!" Joe asserted, stoutly.

By this time they had reached the trio, and the lad began opening the little satchel which he carried slung over his shoulder, an operation unduly lengthened by his eyes being fixed on Georgia.

"This is the worst boy in the neighborhood, Miss Grosve-nor," said Phillis, by way of introduction.

Joe grinned in modest appreciation of the compliment, then shook his head, and observed, in a melancholy tone,—

"I was ; but Tite Peabody's come back from gittin' turned out of his uncle's, and I ain't a patchin' to him."

"How are you, anyway, Joe?" asked Denis.

"Oh, just anyway I can! How do you fix it yourself these days, Mr. Bourke? I wish you'd tell Jim Sober I'm a comin' to see him, ef these plaguy telegrums ever give me a chance ; I'm that drove I don't know half the time whether I'm myself or a yoke o' oxen. Here's *your* ticket, Miss Gros-ve-nor," he continued ; giving her name the benefit of its full number of syllables. But, in spite of his easy assurance of manner and talk, he was so evidently free from any intention of showing disrespect that one could not take offence.

"Joe, how is your aunt?" asked grandma.

"She's a bobbin' about, I thank you, ma'am! Putty cantankerous these days : she thinks it's religion, but it ain't, it's gooseberries. She's allays took so in July, mother says ; but there ain't no end to mother's patience, you know, Miss Davis."

Georgia opened her despatch, read it, and exclaimed,—

"That provoking brother of mine! He did not sail when he intended. He waits for his letter to reach me, and then remembers to telegraph."

"I gave you my opinion of brothers a little while ago,"

observed Phillis ; " here is a proof how correct I was. When does he sail ? "

" Oh, he will not be here till August," Georgia answered, in a tone of such disappointment that Phillis began to console her, and grandma said,—

" The weeks go so fast, my dear ; don't be unhappy."

" I couldn't be here, grandma," Miss Grosvenor replied. Then she noticed that Joe was preparing to take his departure, and whispered to Phillis, " I have no money : lend me fifty cents to give the boy."

" You had better not. He will be offended."

" Nonsense ! "

" Oh, very well ; buy your experience of your own countrymen, my travelled friend," laughed Phillis. " Wait a moment, Joe," she continued aloud, then ran into the house, and presently came back with some money which she slipped into Georgia's hand.

The boy meanwhile had been answering grandma's questions as to matters in his home, where a sister of Joe's father, afflicted with bad health and a worse temper, rendered life a burden to his widow. When the conversation ended Miss Grosvenor offered the lad her gift.

" The telegram was paid," said he.

" Yes, I know ; but this is for you."

The boy grew scarlet to the roots of his hair, treated her to a glance as fiery as if she had struck him, and said, slowly,—

" I'm obliged to you, ma'am ! The company pays me, and I 'arn what I git. We hain't never had no beggars among us Grimshaws, leastways not as ever I heerd, and I shouldn't want to begin the trade."

" I beg your pardon ! " cried Georgia, fairly embarrassed, and conscious that both Phillis and Bourke were enjoying her surprised discomfiture.

" Not a beg ! " returned Joe, brightened at once. " I axpect you and me's both on the square ! I heerd Miss Jumper, she keeps store down to the Corners, say you lived a'most allays in furrin parts : I calculate you hain't got used to our ways. It's all right, ma'am ; I was sort o' riled, but it was only for a minnit."

Georgia laughed, and sat down on a bench at a little dis-

tance to disappoint herself anew by a second perusal of her despatch, after the foolish habit common to mortals when they receive unwelcome tidings. Grandma and Phillis followed to utter comforting assurances, and Joe Grimshaw took the opportunity to favor Mr. Bourke with his opinion in regard to the two young ladies.

"She's a picturful creetur', that Miss Gros-ve-nor," he said; "but then Miss Phillis she's just as harnsome in her way. I'll be snaked ef I can tell which on 'em purties it the most."

"You make up your mind, Joe, and tell me," said Bourke.

"I will," replied Joe, with perfect gravity. "I'm off now; that was the last of the telegrams, and I've got a chore of my own on hand."

"What have you got to do?"

"You know Bill Winston? Wal, I'm goin' to give him Hail Columbia! I promised him I would last Sunday when he pinched me in meetin', and he'll find I mean to keep my word. Ef he can see to wink out of his glass eye to-morrow, you may call me a Dutchman."

Joe departed, whistling an air from "The Grand Duchess," rendered familiar by peripatetic hand-organs, evidently in a state of high satisfaction with himself and his anticipated evening's occupation.

Bourke was still laughing when he joined the ladies, and made them laugh too by a recital of Joe's perplexity between their respective charms, and his sense of virtue and righteous retribution in the chastisement he proposed to bestow upon his enemy.

"Do you mean to tell me there are many boys who would feel as he did about being offered money?" Georgia asked.

"Indeed I do," replied Phillis. "Ask Denis Bourke if he hadn't numerous lessons to learn after he came to live in this wilderness."

"I begin to think I have too," said Georgia, and mentally added that her discoveries came from more quarters than one.

Miss Grosvenor talked a great deal to grandma about her brother, and Phillis often playfully declared that she was certain her relative nourished a secret romantic passion for this unknown personage, whom the girl had christened "The Troubadour," on account of his handsome face, as portrayed in the photograph which Miss Grosvenor had displayed. But

Phillis audaciously asserted that she preferred downright ugliness in a man, and was sure in advance that if ever she met the original of the picture she should hate him just by reason of that beauty; though she admitted that the melancholy eyes and the sensitive mouth, which would have been fairly feminine in its sweetness, but for the intense pride revealed there also, ought to have belonged to a poet or painter, "or some other preposterous impossible creature," as she usually wound up her commendation.

To-night, after Denis Bourke had departed, and the three ladies were seated over the tea-table, grandma began again making a great many inquiries in regard to Maurice Peyton, in a friendly, interested fashion, which Georgia liked. Phillis listened almost in silence to the conversation; and Georgia was struck anew by a peculiarity of the odd young woman which she had often noticed. Though a great talker,—by fits and starts, however,—Phillis was the least given to asking questions or granting personal information of anybody Miss Grosvenor had ever met.

"You would be an admirable companion for a person who had a secret to keep, P. French," she said, later, as the two were strolling up and down the lawn in the twilight, while grandma kept watch in the veranda.

"I am, and should be, admirable under any and all circumstances," Phillis replied. "But whence this sudden outburst of appreciation, G. G.?"

"And if you had a secret to keep, the tortures of the Inquisition would not wring it from you," pursued Georgia.

"Do it more!" cried Phillis. "I can bear a huge amount of praise. My dear, if it should ever be thought necessary to give my memoirs to an admiring world, you shall have the honor of writing them."

"But even a virtue can be exaggerated," added Georgia.

"I seem to have heard or read something of that sort,—I rather think in an old copy-book," said Phillis. "Content yourself with praising me; there you show positive originality."

"For three entire weeks you let me make ridiculous blunders in regard to Mr. Bourke, and never opened your lips. I merely cite this as an instance of going too far in your virtuous habit,—not because it was of any real consequence, you understand."

"Oh, I understand perfectly."

"But I want you to see your error."

"I don't, though. It was a pleasure to you to build up a theory and judge him thereby; why should I deprive you of the satisfaction?"

"And now you do not even show a natural human curiosity in regard to my Maurice," continued Georgia, recommencing her attack from a new point.

"It is not worth while, since he is coming here. It's like rubbing the bloom off a plum to find out all about a person in advance."

"Women have spoiled him a great deal, but he is very nice in many ways,—only such a dreadful flirt!"

"Was that said to caution me?" asked Phillis, calmly.

"Do you mean to accuse me of impertinence?" retorted Georgia, feeling vaguely conscience-stricken, and taking refuge in pretended indignation.

"Don't answer my question by another. Was it? You know you might just as well reply at once, and tell the truth; you will have to."

Miss Grosvenor was so thoroughly acquainted with her friend's persistency that she knew to procrastinate would be useless; certain, too, that Phillis had already read her thought as clearly as if she had expressed it, by that strange, clairvoyant-like power she possessed.

"Upon my word, I believe I must say yes!" cried Georgia, somewhat dismayed. "Are you vexed, ~~Phillis~~?"

"Not in the least."

"But, then, all men are flirts—"

"They are not. Denis Bourke isn't, for one."

"You are very confident. Does he like you?"

"Flirt with him and find out."

"I feel half inclined. You wouldn't be angry?"

"Why, if he belonged to me, and you could turn his head, I'd say a good riddance."

Just then grandma called Miss Grosvenor to come and look at a wonderful moth which had settled on a vine at the farther end of the porch, and Georgia went away.

Left to herself, Phillis began to laugh softly.

"Oh, G. G.!" *she said, half aloud, and nodded her head several times with a satisfied air.*

CHAPTER IX.

THE days flew on so fast that Miss Grosvenor tried to account, vainly as ever, for the flight of time. She was playfully derided by Phillis for trying, and grandma said, in her sweet, gentle way,—

"Whenever it has gone you can be thankful, my dear. You say you are happy, and certainly you are on the high-road to health."

"I should think so," returned Georgia. "My dear grandma, I can sleep eight hours at a stretch, and as for my appetite—"

"Don't rouse unpleasant reflections in my mind, G. G.," broke in Phillis. "I detest personalities, and I wouldn't hurt your feelings for the world; but, if I can count, I've twenty-seven chickens less than I had when you arrived. As for eggs, unless I find some hens like that celebrated fowl of old Guinness's, that laid two a day, I shall have to give up all hope of having any to send to market."

"That proves you haven't given me anything else to eat. I'd be ashamed to be so stingy."

"Cinders!" Phillis French called to that handmaid, who chanced to pass the open door at the moment.

"Yes m!" said Cinders, beginning to giggle.

"Tell Ninny to make a strawberry short-cake for tea, richer than usual, and skim a quart of cream," ordered Phillis. "I'll have my revenge, Miss Georgia. You will eat yourself into such an indigestion that you'll have to live on calcined magnesia for three days to come."

"If I know myself," said Georgia, "I am able to suffer resignedly in a good cause, Miss French."

"As Denis Bourke offended me yesterday," continued Phillis, "I shall send for him, so that he may share your indigestion."

This sending for Bourke, or his appearing when not sent for, had long grown to be of such daily occurrence that Miss Grosvenor received the proposal quite as a matter of course. *As acquaintance with Bourke had gradually dispelled her*

first idea that any liking for the man on Phillis's part would be a thing to regret; oddly enough, the probability of such liking ceased to haunt Georgia, and she put by reflection on the subject in a fashion as unaccountable as the manner in which she deferred any contemplation or decision concerning her own future.

The gentleman opened the garden gate just after the mention of his name, and was cordially received by the three ladies.

"For once," said Phillis, "this exile of Erin has come when he was wanted. He shall be rewarded by an invitation to partake of our humble fare; but he must promise not to devour six hot biscuits, as he did the last time we honored him with a seat at our vestal board."

"I meant to stop whether you asked me or not," Denis replied, with composed assurance. "But the biscuit business is an awful slander: I never touch such indigestible abominations."

"If I hear any impertinence, you'll get your national diet,—potatoes and buttermilk," vowed Phillis.

But Mr. Bourke was fated to wait a good while for his supper, and to eat it in the solitude of his own dwelling. At this moment a horse and wagon, which he recognized as his property, halted at the gate.

"Why, there is Patrick!" he exclaimed. "What's amiss, I wonder?"

He and Phillis hurried down the path; and Patrick, having caught sight of them, could be heard calling,—

"Oh, Misther Denis, it's sarchin' yez I am!"

"Something must be the matter," grandma said to Miss Grosvenor; "for Patrick never drives if he can help it."

Georgia gave the old lady her arm, and they followed the other two, which, however, proved unnecessary, so far as hearing what was said went, for the voices rang out clearly enough in the stillness to render every word audible.

Phillis and Bourke were descending simultaneously.

"What is the matter? What has happened?"

"Oh, Misther Denis, Misther Denis!" repeated Patrick.

"Confound you!" cried Bourke. "Can't you say what's up?"

"It's down ye mane, I'm thinking!" retorted the old

man ; " and don't take this opportunity to lose yer temper, Dinis darlin', for we'll have enough to do to occupy all our facoolties."

" Oh, Patrick, don't be aggravating !" exclaimed Phillis.

" Is that yersilf, Miss Phaylis ? The hoight of welcome to ye, and be the same token to the grandmother, and the town lady comin' down the path unknownst."

" Is the house on fire ?" asked Denis.

" Why would ye think it ?" returned Patrick. " Ain't I tellin' ye over and over it's the docthor we want, and at once, for Tabitha ?"

" Has she hurt herself ?"

" Why would she ? Only givin' wan screech from froight, as a faymale might, ye know,—savin' your prisence, Miss Phaylis,—but, barrin' that, she behaved as well as possible. We were just looking at the spotted cow—"

" Oh, is the spotted cow sick ?" Phillis asked.

" She's a mother since the mornin', miss, but doing well, and the calf a lively thing. It was climbin' the fince when he heard us, to hide that he was there, instid of mindin' his dooties ; that was the cause of the misfortin'."

To keep from laughing was out of the question, and Denis knew that any betrayal of impatience would only further lengthen the old man's account.

" Who climbed the fence ?" he asked.

" Ah, that's what he didn't do, for he fell backward, and that's how he doubled his leg under him," returned Patrick. " But byes will be byes, so we mustn't be haird on him ; though, for my own part, I tell ye frankly I'll never belave Jemmy Sober 'll grow up worth his salt."

" So Jemmy has broken his leg ?"

" He'd have done it as sure as powers, av it hadn't been he bruk his arrum," said Patrick. " So the harness bein' on the old horse, I pit him in the cart, and drove down here to give ye warnin'."

" But we must have the doctor, Patrick."

" We must, av ye insist," replied Patrick, in a discontented tone ; " but Masther Denis, ye minded the dog's leg so illigantly, that av he hadn't died he'd have been trottin' about as free as ever : so av yez thry yer hand on the bye it wad be a savin' for the mother."

"And Jem Sober would go in search of the dog," observed Phillis. "Away with you, Denis! You will just catch the doctor at the station; he had to go to Moulton, and was coming back by this evening's train; it will be in by the time you get down the hill."

Bourke uttered hasty adieus to the three ladies, and jumped into the wagon.

"But you will come back to tea; we can very well wait awhile," said grandma.

"Thanks; no. I shall go home the other road, and I must stop with poor little Jem this evening."

He drove off, but even amid the clatter of the wheels Patrick was heard to remark,—

"Sure ye might have consinted, Misther Denis; av the ladies wanted ye for aeting, it's a pity not to give them their way; though that's not to make a rule of, ye mind, for av ye give in too much to faymales—"

The rest of the sentence was lost to the listeners, but, as Phillis observed in the midst of her laughter, it was not difficult to divine what it must have been.

Grandma had to bestow a great deal of commiseration upon poor little Jem Sober and his mother, then they went in to tea.

While they were at table, Mr. Sykes was reported to be in the kitchen, waiting to hold an interview with Miss French, and, as Phillis said that she should be busy for at least an hour examining accounts, Georgia set forth on a solitary walk.

When she got home again, she discovered that Phillis had finished her business with the overseer, and had gone on an errand to the house of Ann Raines, an elderly virgin of the neighborhood, who did needle-work for her, and was always ready to be called upon when circumstances demanded an extra hand in Phillis French's kitchen or laundry.

Miss Grosvenor went in search of grandma, whom she found in her room, seated at an *escritoire*, busy among neatly-arranged packages of papers.

"Come in, my dear," she said, as Georgia expressed a fear that she had disturbed her. "I was looking for a recipe I wanted, and got to turning over old letters,—reading them, too, before I knew what I was about,—always a foolish thing for a person of my age to do."

"That is Phillis's hand," Miss Grosvenor remarked, glancing at the superscription on an envelope into which grandma was putting the epistle she had been reading when interrupted by Georgia's entrance. "There is no mistaking her peculiar chirography."

"Yes, these are all from her," grandma replied, pointing to a large pile.

Intimate as they had grown, Phillis's past still remained a sealed book to her friend, which the girl showed no inclination to open.

"I did not know she had ever been away from you long enough to afford time for such a voluminous correspondence," Georgia said, in surprise.

"We were together when she was a little child, but after that I never saw her till five years ago," said grandma. "Hasn't she told you anything about herself?"

"Not a word! She is the most secretive girl I ever met."

"Ah, well, I can understand that it is painful to look back," sighed the old lady. "But I'll tell you, because you will only like her the better; and you do like her."

"I love her dearly!"

"I am so glad! My dear, I can give you no idea what a happiness your coming here has proved to both of us."

"I know it is just the pleasantest thing that ever happened to me," replied Georgia, kissing grandma's forehead. "Now, do tell me about Phil, and where she got all her accomplishments and her practical knowledge. Why, she is like three people rolled into one, and keeping the distinct idiosyncrasies of the trio!"

"She certainly is not an ordinary girl," grandma said, with a smile which showed thankfulness, not pride. "Let me see: where shall I begin?"

"Oh, at the beginning!" cried Georgia. "I dote on long stories."

Grandma shook her head.

"I am seventy-nine," she answered; "it would be a long story indeed if I were to go all the way back; but I'll tell you about my Phillis. I was a rich widow, living in Albany. I had lost my children one after another,—six, my dear,—and I only had my youngest girl left. I can't tell you how lovely *she was*; *Phillis is like her a little*, but her mother was posi-

tively a beauty. Well,—I suppose it was my fault,—she grew up very wilful and headstrong. I was a weak woman always. Before she was eighteen she married Gerald French—against my wishes; I distrusted him from the first.”

She paused for a moment; a slight dew gathered in her eyes. With one hand she softly patted Georgia, the other rested on the package of letters. Miss Grosvenor's interest and sympathy helped to increase self-gratulation at her opportune entrance, for she comprehended that if she had not chanced to find her in this retrospective mood, months might have elapsed without the reticent old lady's bestowing such confidence.

“Was he young,—handsome?” Georgia asked, softly.

“Barely four-and-twenty, and the handsomest man I ever saw,” returned Mrs. Davis. “He was a Wall Street broker, and had the reputation of being very wealthy; but he was not: he was only a reckless speculator. They went to live in New York, and I went with them. Phillis was born within the year; her mother lived till Phillis was seven.”

“And the husband——”

“My child, he was a man-tiger; that is the only word which can give you any idea of him. There was no misery, no degradation, through which he did not drag us, for Elsie would not leave him, and I could not leave her. I couldn't tell you; I couldn't soil your ears with the story. He got all my money; you can easily understand: he conquered me through her. The last of my fortune went to save him from exposure and punishment, then he turned me out of doors.”

She told the story with a pathetic composure which touched Georgia more than any violent emotion could have done. The poor soul had lived so many years in the companionship of those terrible memories that she had even grown used to the burden, as the galley-slave does to the weight of his chain.

“He turned me out of doors in the middle of a winter night,” she continued, in the same slow, weary voice. “My dear, I wandered about the streets till morning. I had no money in my pocket; even at that pass I could not bear to go to any friend's house and tell the story, for Elsie and I had kept our secret through the whole. Well, I went back in the morning; he let me in, for my girl was dying. She lived

only a week,—heart-disease, the doctors said; so it was, for her heart was broken."

The tears were streaming down Georgia's cheeks; the old lady wiped them away herself, saying,—

"Don't cry: it hurts me. It must appear strange to you that I can talk so quietly, but, somehow, I have never seemed to feel anything very keenly since Elsie died, and I've had so many years now in which to be thankful that God took her."

Georgia could not speak; she lifted grandma's hand to her lips with a sympathy and reverence such as she had rarely felt for any human being.

"Of course I have never told Phillis of these things," the old lady went on; "she can remember enough to know that her father was a bad man, but I think she never knew the worst."

"Oh, I hope not," Georgia said. "And what did you do after—"

"After Elsie's death there came an old friend of mine, a distant relation, too, of Mr. French's; she offered to take Phillis and bring her up as her own daughter. She was a rich widow, with two step-sons, but they were grown men, and had always hated her, so that her life was very solitary. What could I do? I was a poor, helpless creature, used all my days to luxury, and, besides, Gerald French would not have given Phillis to me."

"And after the lady took Phil?"

"I couldn't be a burden on my friends; I couldn't begin to work at my age; I could get no work, even. I meant to go into a home. Mrs. Granger was ready to help me, and I had still a few valuables left from my jewels, which would have aided. Well, just then there came back from California a man I had not seen for five-and-twenty years. He had loved me when we were young; he wanted me to marry him, old as we were, and I did."

"Ah!" exclaimed Georgia, with a sigh of relief.

"Yes, my dear, and we spent a good many peaceful years together. I had only two crosses,—Mr. Davis's ill health and the separation from Phillis."

"He could not take her?"

"Her father would not hear of it, he hated me so. My husband offered him money, more than he could well afford,

for he was not rich, but French even refused that. At least I could feel she was in good hands."

"But you didn't see her often? Didn't she visit you?"

"My husband and I went to California, and he soon fell into such wretched health that he could not travel. Once, when Phillis was about twelve, I went East. Mrs. Granger met me part way, and I had a blessed visit with my darling."

"After that—"

"Ah, after that I did not see Phillis until a little over five years ago. My husband died quite suddenly. A stock company in which his money was invested became bankrupt just before, and I found myself with about three hundred dollars a year."

"Oh, dear! And Phillis?"

"It was only a fortnight after the funeral; I sat writing to Phillis, for we had corresponded regularly, and I had grown very anxious, because for many weeks I had failed to hear from her. Phillis walked into the room without any warning. Mrs. Granger was dead,—had died some time previous, as suddenly as my husband."

"But didn't she keep her promise about providing for Phillis?"

"Yes; she gave Phillis sixty thousand dollars: the rest went to her step-sons. Phillis's money was in stocks or some company, she never really explained to me. At all events, they failed just after Mrs. Granger's death; she had only a few thousand dollars in money by her; there was, besides, this farm, which Mrs. Granger had given her, the only land she could will away."

"And then you were both poor again!" sighed Georgia.

"Yes," replied grandma, with a placid smile, "or we should have been poor enough, except for Phillis's head."

"But would not Mrs. Granger's step-sons help?"

"No; they had always been jealous of Phillis; said their father's widow was cheating them for the sake of that girl; indeed, she would not have touched a penny if they had offered it."

"Of course Mrs. Granger had been devoted to her?"

"Like a mother, and had educated her so carefully, so nicely, not only in books and accomplishments, but she trained her in house-keeping; she had herself always managed a

large estate she owned near Albany, and Phillis helped her in that, and indeed actually managed it during the last year of Mrs. Granger's life."

"And she was as brave as possible, I know, when the troubles overtook her," said Georgia.

"She came with all her plans arranged. She had been out here in Pennsylvania, and got the house ready; then she took the rail to San Francisco, and on up country to me. So we returned together, and here we have lived ever since, and they tell me that in the whole country there is no better conducted farm than Phillis's."

"What a wonderful girl!" exclaimed Georgia. "Oh, how ashamed it makes me of my useless life!"

"Nay, my dear, no life is useless because it does not hold actual physical labor. You may be thankful to have been spared Phillis's trials."

"The poor dear, just when she was at the age most to prize wealth and pleasure!"

"Yes; she had that last winter begun to go into society. Mrs. Granger used to write me that she quite electrified those sober, stately Albanians."

"And never a regret?"

"We never speak of the old days. At first it seemed wiser not to do so. Now we have got so out of the habit that we should find it difficult to begin."

"And Phillis's father?"

"Some ten years ago, Mrs. Granger sent me a newspaper containing an account of his death. He had been on board a sailing-vessel bound for Havre. All the passengers and most of the crew were lost. Neither of us ever mentioned it in our letters; Phillis has never spoken to me about him. I don't think his name has passed my lips since the day I showed my husband the journal that told us he could never do any more harm in this world. At least now I can say, may God have mercy on his soul!"

She released her hand from Georgia's, turned to the *escritoire*, shut and locked it. The shadows of twilight had filled the room unnoticed by either. Georgia rose, saying something about going in search of a light. She would not risk a single question or word after the old lady showed that the subject *was at an end*. Just then Phillis called from the passage,—

"Grandma, are you there? Where is Miss Grosvenor?"

"We are both here," the old lady answered, quietly.

"You might make it a little darker if you put down the curtains and shut the windows," laughed Phillis.

In another moment she appeared with a lamp in her hand, and glanced quickly from one face to the other; but though the traces of tears must have been plainly visible on Georgia's cheeks, she did not seem to observe them.

"I wish you would play and sing something, both of you," grandma said, after Phillis had given an account of their neighbor's indisposition, and the information that it was nothing serious.

They went into the parlor, and as Phillis was opening the piano, Georgia suddenly gave her a tremendous hug.

"I shall think you were a bear before evolution went far enough in your case to make you a woman," said Phillis.

Georgia held her off at arms'-length, and looked at her with admiring eyes.

"I know all about it now!" she exclaimed. "You are—oh, I don't know how to express what I think you are!"

"P. French, at your service," returned Phillis, with a courtesy. "Grandma is a gossip, and you are a goose. Now I am going to sing, just to punish you both."

CHAPTER X.

It was a lovely afternoon towards the middle of August; the old house still as some enchanted dwelling in a fairy-tale.

The dogs dozed on the porch; the gray cat lay stretched upon the steps, too indolent to do more than whisk his tail impatiently when a bird flew out of the vines or tree-branches and daringly passed so near his face as to make the little flutter of its wings distinctly audible.

Grandma and Miss Grosvenor were keeping each other company in the veranda, but the warmth of the atmosphere had affected them *also*, and they sat silent. Grandma had *fallen asleep*, and Georgia might as well have been, so far as

any control over her thoughts went; they wandered and rested wheresoever it pleased them, in a vagrant fashion at once agreeable and unpractical. She was conscious of thinking that her brother, who had telegraphed his landing, and his dutiful intention of visiting Aunt Conyngham before coming to her, might arrive by any train,—that it seemed impossible that somewhat over three months had elapsed since her own arrival in this tranquil haunt,—and that, oddly enough, Denis Bourke had not appeared at the Nest since the previous evening. These aimless reflections blended with her placid appreciation of the quiet; her enjoyment of the subdued note of insect and bird; her notice of the color of leaf and flower, the white fleecy clouds in the molten blue overhead, and all the varied details which united into the harmonious whole that rendered her imaginatively sensuous comfort complete.

Down in the garden the bees hummed among the flower-beds and kept up a pretence of work; the pigeons sat on the roof of the dove-cote, and now and then exchanged a few remarks in a soft half-complaining tone; the roses nodded in the light breeze, and perfumed the air with their breath; and the low murmurs of the brook could be heard from its pebbly bed at the extremity of the bower-like enclosure.

Under the shade of a knot of maple-trees stood a low structure, so covered with blossoming vines that it resembled a huge bird's nest more than anything else. This was Phillis French's dairy, built over the streamlet, and the coolest, most inviting spot imaginable on a summer afternoon.

Phillis was there now, attended by her youngest handmaiden. Cinders had been making butter, and Phillis, with her usual vigilance, had peeped in to be certain that the operation was successful enough to suit her critical judgment. But there was nothing but praise to bestow upon Cinders's efforts; the butter was delicious to smell and taste, and very tempting the golden balls looked, shining through the water in which they were placed in readiness to send that evening to market.

Phillis began moulding a mass into fantastic shapes to grace the tea-table, deftly turning out little scrolls by the aid of a tiny machine, stamping other portions into round pats, printed with quaint devices, to please her whim and waken admiration in Georgia's mind.

It would have been difficult to conceive a lovelier picture

than she presented in the midst of her pastoral surroundings. She had pinned back the sleeves of her blue muslin gown, and tied a snowy apron over the front; a ray of sunlight stole in and touched her head, turning her wavy auburn hair to dusky gold; the tint of her dress brought out in full relief the exquisite delicacy of her complexion, which neither sun nor wind was ever able to injure; her very attitude was the perfection of unstudied grace; and the symmetry of the round white arms and dimpled hands would have roused a painter to enthusiasm.

A young man came through the field which stretched between the dwelling and the wood, opened the garden-gate, and took the path which led past the spring-house. Catching sight of the interior, he stood still, thinking very justly that in all his wide experience of his own country and foreign lands he had never seen a prettier tableau.

This amateur butter-maker (so his thoughts ran) might have served as a model for a painting of Marie Antoinette playing dairy-maid,—such a graceful, aristocratic-looking creature, such marvellous coloring, and such a heavenly mouth!

Phillis, devoting all her energies to her occupation,—a habit of hers, whatever the work might be,—would have remained unconscious of this admiring scrutiny had not Cinders, arriving at the end of her task, turned with a pile of milk-pans in her arms to take them out into the sun, and perceived the intruder. In her astonishment she let the top pan slip from its perch, and it fell with a loud ring to the ground.

"Laws, Miss Phillis!" Cinders exclaimed.

"Don't apostrophize me, Cinders: I am not to blame for your awkwardness," said Phillis, without lifting her head.

"Laws, Miss Phillis!" repeated Cinders, startled out of her usually serene good manners by the suddenness of the apparition, and still more by her certainty who the gentleman must be; though, since he had been expected any day during the last week, Cinders's great surprise appeared uncalled for. "Laws!" and down went a second milk-pan with even more fracas than the first, and left Cinders in a state of hopeless confusion over a performance which seemed to qualify her, the quick and sure-handed, for a prominent place among the "*awkward squad*."

"Good gracious!" cried Phillis. "Miriam the prophetess never made a worse noise with her cymbals! What has come to you, Cinders?"

She moved as she spoke, thereby treating the abandoned young gentleman to a full view of the lovely face he had been so attentively studying in profile.

"Laws!" gasped Cinders anew, and this time ran out of the spring-house by the door opposite to that near which the apparition stood.

Phillis laid down the butter-mould and walked forward, saying, with composure,—

"So it was in your honor, Mr. Peyton, that Cinderella burst into that impromptu overture? You are very welcome, to be sure,—or you will be to your sister in-doors: the milk-pans, not the boarders, live here in the spring-house."

"I beg your pardon!" the gentleman exclaimed, with eyes and voice full of admiration and astonishment.

"Not at all," said Phillis. "If you like buttermilk, you shall have some."

"I never tasted it," he replied.

"Then you shall remedy that misfortune at once," said she, and filled a tumbler with the creamy beverage and presented it to him.

He sipped a little, made a rather wry mouth under his long moustache, and said, unhesitatingly,—

"It is delicious!"

"Drink it, then," commanded Phillis, her eyes beginning to dance with mischief.

"I—I—I'm afraid it is rather rich," said he, laughing at this summary way of punishing his deceitfulness.

"Oh, if you suffer from dyspepsia, pray don't touch it!" she cried, anxiously.

"Never had anything of the sort in my life," he answered, rather indignantly.

She gave him a glance of commiserating doubt.

"You must have, you know; else you'd not be afraid to drink this, since you find it delicious," she insisted.

"I meant in appearance," he explained. "The mistress of the house must be a very good-natured person to let her young lady lodgers play at amateur dairy-work," he added.

"On the contrary, she's a very cross old thing," said Phillis.

"I suppose, then, she belongs to the honorable body of spinsters," returned he.

"And acts as if she fancied herself keeping a private school instead of a boarding-house," said Phillis.

"Republican equality!" laughed he. "You and my sister must find her rather a bore."

"I do, most decidedly; but Georgia professes not to mind having her about everywhere,—at table and in the parlor."

"Georgia has suddenly grown very democratic in her ideas," he said, somewhat disdainfully.

"I am afraid you will think so," she replied, with a sudden inflection of sadness in her voice. Then she stopped abruptly, ejaculated, "Oh!" and looked somewhat frightened, as if in her heedlessness she had come near betraying something which Georgia might not like to have told.

"I shall depend on you to reveal to me the secrets of the prison-house," said Peyton, partly from a wish to lessen her girlish confusion, but more because he was desirous to establish himself as quickly as possible on grounds of familiar acquaintance with this pretty creature.

"Oh, I shall be sure to; I'm so careless!" replied she.

"Carefulness and primness ought to be left to elderly cats, like your Miss— What is the name of the person who keeps the house?"

"French," said Phillis. "P. French she writes herself, and she will hate you at once and forever if she suspects that you know she was christened Priscilla."

"I shall call her so, then, the first time she is troublesome. In spite of Georgia's weakness,—which seems odd enough,—we will discover means to put the woman in her place."

"It would be such a relief!" cried Phillis, enthusiastically.

"You must find it rather a bore to be buried in this out-of-the-way spot for the summer?" he continued.

"Georgia pretends to like it."

"And you sacrifice yourself on her account?" said Peyton, jumping to the conclusion that this lovely girl must be Miss Moreland, a famous beauty and heiress about whom his sister had several times written to him. "But Georgia's last letter told me she was quite well and strong again. I should think the banishment from civilized regions might end soon."

"You will be able to decide about that when you see how

she looks," Phillis observed, and her words reminded Peyton that a little show of brotherly haste to meet his sister might be found becoming. He had positively forgotten everything and everybody in the pleasure of watching this graceful girl and listening to the soft, musical voice which was one of her great charms. "I suppose I shall find Georgia in the house?"

"I left her sitting on the porch, looking like the Princess Nonchalanti in the fairy-story. If you follow that path to the left you will reach her. Don't take the wrong turning and land in the kitchen."

"I should risk offending your Miss French in the very outset," said he. "I hope I sha'n't lose my way. What a pretty garden! The whole place is as charming as possible, if there were only some means of banishing the ogress."

"Then we might be deprived of our bread and pudding."

"Ah, to be sure! Every creature has its use, they say."

"Even P. French!" she added, laughing. "*Au revoir*, Mr. Peyton." And she retreated into the spring-house as she spoke. So Maurice, having no further excuse to linger, went his way.

Phillis returned to her table and her butter-printing, and had a low but hearty laugh all to herself.

"That young gentleman has more to learn than Georgia even. Luckily, he has fallen among able teachers," was the reflection which ensued, and very wicked and mischievous Phillis French looked as she indulged in it.

Grandma had awakened from her doze, and, finding herself refreshed thereby, had trotted off into the kitchen to ask Ninny some question. Georgia concluded that she had wasted time enough in aimless fancies, and rose with the intention of seeking Phillis. Just as she reached the steps she saw her brother, uttered a joyful exclamation, and in another instant they were exchanging affectionate greetings.

"After all, you have taken me by surprise," she said. "As you did not come yesterday, I decided that Aunt Conyngham would keep you over Sunday."

"I found there was no end to the dinner-parties and the dancing, so I fled," he replied. "I couldn't get any trap at your station; they said I could shorten my walk by what the men called 'cutting 'cross lots,' but I got out of my way and *found myself* at Mr. Bourke's house: of course I'd meant to

see you first. So, as I was there, I got rid of the dust, and old Patrick showed me a path here through the wood."

"Then you have not seen Mr. Bourke?"

"No; he had driven into the town. I say, I landed in the dairy, and there was such a lovely creature playing at butter-making. Your friend Miss Moreland, I concluded. You didn't tell me she was with you."

Georgia of course divined that he had fallen upon Phillis. She was hugely diverted at his blunder, and determined not to set him right.

"One can't remember everything," she said.

"If I'd known that beautiful girl was here, Aunt Conyng-ham shouldn't have kept me a day."

"What a charming brother!" laughed Georgia.

"I really believe you are handsomer than ever," said he.

"I suppose your being out of health was just a caprice."

"I am very well now, at any rate."

They began to ask each other questions about mutual acquaintances in Europe and America, and talked for a few moments in the broken, rambling way people do after a lengthened separation, where there is so much to be asked and told that for a time conversation is discursive.

"You ought to have some letters for me," said Peyton, finally. "I wrote two days ago to the bankers to forward them here."

"Yes; three came this morning; I'll bring them to you." Georgia ran into the house. Just after she had passed up the stairs, Peyton perceived a tall, angular woman coming along the passage. Spinster was written in every fold of her dress, every line in her face.

"Land's sake!" she exclaimed, pausing in the door-way.

"The ogress! I suppose I must do the polite," thought Peyton. He rose and bowed with great ceremony. The ogress looked still more astonished, but evidently was not to be outdone in elegant civility; she seized the tail of her gown in one hand, waved the other in the air like a truncheon, and dropped two courtesies in rapid succession.

"Why, how *do* you do? I hope you're pretty well. I never see you looking better, though, *to* be sure, I never had the pleasure afore! I *s'pose* you're Miss Gros-ve-nor's brother—*why sartinly!* I've heerd all about it: you've come to stay

to Denis Bourke's. Wal, a bachelor's house ain't much to brag about gin'rally, but Tabitha Perkins hez got facoolty enough ef she's let alone, and she won't be meddled with neither,—and there she's right,—though Bourke he ain't a Betty, I will say; and old Patrick, though he's as obstinate as a mule and a little Jack donkey under the wagon, knows too well which side *his* bread's buttered to try it on if he wanted, which mebbby he don't, for let's be just before we're generous."

She stopped to take breath, and Peyton, not knowing what else to do, bowed again. The ogress immediately performed her other salaams, more remarkable than their predecessors, and burst out anew:

"And so you've come to be nigh your sister, Mr.—Mr. Peeton? I ain't very good at names, but I got yours fixed in my head. Southern, ain't it? *To* be sure! Wal, I must be off, fur I've got to go to the Corners, and I'm late! If so be you find yourself round anywhere near *my* territory, just run in; don't stop for ceremony on my account. Good-by, Mr. Peeton."

With another salute and engaging smile, the ogress fled. As she disappeared, Peyton muttered something which evidently was not a compliment, to judge by the expression of his face. He heard the sound of suppressed laughter behind him, turned towards the porch, and saw again the charming vision which had quite startled him by its unexpectedness a short time before.

If possible, the young lady looked still more lovely. True, she had arranged her sleeves in an orthodox fashion, and it seemed a shame to hide such plump white arms; but as she stood framed in among the trailing vines she made a second picture as attractive to his artistic eyes as the first had been.

"I have encountered the ogress," he said.

"So I perceive," she answered.

"And you mean to say that you and Georgia have been able to endure a three months' stay under that horrible creature's roof?"

"We still survive," she said, gazing beyond him into the hall, from whence her laughter was echoed by Miss Grosvenor, who had come noiselessly down-stairs and stood listening to *their conversation*.

Peyton glanced over his shoulder, and said,—

"Georgia, you are a most unnatural specimen of a sister! What did you mean by running off and leaving me at the mercy of your inhuman landlady?"

"Bless me, Phillis! What have you been doing to my innocent and unprotected brother?" cried Georgia.

"I offered him buttermilk to drink, and showed him the way to the house—"

"But you left me to fall into the clutches of the ogress," he interrupted. "Georgia, instead of standing there to laugh in that fiendish manner, I think you might do me the honor to present me to your friend Miss—"

"Oh, I'm satisfied as to your identity," Phillis interrupted, in her turn: "it is mine that requires establishing."

"Miss French, allow me to introduce my brother. I wish he were more worthy your acquaintance and his sister's merits; but we must be merciful," said Georgia, with mock solemnity.

"Miss French!" Peyton could not believe his ears. This lovely, aristocratic-looking creature a relative of the ogress. Oh! and what had he said? But the similarity in name must, of course, be the only tie between them. Still, why had Georgia not set him right when he had spoken of her as Miss Moreland?

He gave his sister a quick glance of mingled helplessness and vexation, which caused both girls to laugh more heartily than ever.

"Mr. Peyton, the ogress makes you welcome to her den," said Phillis, sweeping him a low courtesy.

This elegant girl the landlady!—a person who took in summer lodgers! About as easy for Peyton, with his ideas and prejudices, to credit, as if somebody had shown him one of Lawrence's most refined portraits and declared the original had been a barmaid.

"I think these mystifications come under the head of what the Arkansas man called 'unjustifiable tricks on travellers,'" said he.

Georgia perceived that he was not convinced, and, afraid he might say something which would prove an annoyance to himself, if not to Phillis, hastened to add,—

"Miss French really has the good fortune to own this lovely old place; she is to be congratulated, is she not?"

"Indeed, yes! It is—perfect!" he exclaimed, glad of anything to say.

"And you have made acquaintance with our neighbor, Miss Raines," pursued Georgia. "I knew you would enjoy her conversation, so I did not come down-stairs and interrupt you."

"You told me she was the mistress of the house?" he said to Phillis, in a reproachful tone.

"Oh, no; you said so, and I was too polite to contradict," replied Phillis. "He thought her the model of a spinster landlady, Georgia! I am so sorry for your disappointment, Mr. Peyton. It was really touching to see you trying to soften her obdurate heart by your fascinations."

"He has succeeded! She will invite him to tea by the day after to-morrow," cried Georgia.

"Your conduct is abominable!" declared Peyton. "It was sheer pity for you two unfortunates that made me attempt to propitiate the dragon."

"You see, Georgia, he has adopted a new name for her; ogress belongs to the person of the house," said Phillis.

"I ought to have known that such an enchanted bower must have a fairy princess for its mistress," returned Peyton, laughing, and trying to get his wits back, though still marveling by what freak of fortune this girl could have become the proprietress of a "country boarding-house." But that must be all nonsense; Georgia had styled the place so in her letter just to mystify him. Miss French was certainly a lady in their own rank of life,—Georgia's intimate friend, doubtless. The pair had hidden themselves for the summer in this picturesque retreat, to rest after the fatigues and triumphs of their winter in town.

At this instant Cinders appeared in the hall, still somewhat confused by the recollection of the fallen pans and her own awkwardness, unprecedented in the annals of her history.

"Miss Phillis, if you could step this way," she said.

"I am tired, and cannot take a step in any direction," replied that young lady, resting herself on the door-step. "Is it about the butter, Cinders? Well, what does Rogers say?"

"He says he is only giving fifteen cents a pound—"

"Tell him he will have to give me eighteen," broke in *Phillis*: "*he knows he will, so I wonder he wasted his time*"

in useless argument. Oh! and tell him he can have the chickens, but he waited so long to make up his mind about the pig that I sold it to Mr. Morley."

While speaking, she covertly watched Peyton with infinite delight at the effect produced by her words. She knew that he looked positively stupid with bewilderment. Was she really a farmer? Were her dairy-maid efforts no town lady's freak to amuse a dull hour, but a *bona fide* business operation, with pecuniary benefits for a basis? Did she actually sell chickens and rear pigs? And there she sat, the personification of elegance, while volubly pouring forth talk which, according to Master Maurice's theories, was as much out of keeping with her appearance as the dropping of frogs from the mouth of the beauty in the fairy-tale. And yet theories and opinions were at fault, for he told himself that if she had been discussing matters prosaic even to repulsion she would have rendered them charming by her accent and face.

He experienced the sensation Georgia had so often undergone,—that the girl was absolutely reading his thoughts. He perceived that his sister was hugely enjoying his dazed astonishment, and felt that to give her a shaking would be a relief. Luckily, he bethought him of the letters Georgia had brought, and began to glance at the superscriptions, as if eager to learn their contents.

"Your brother finds these domestic details wearisome, Georgia," said Phillis, in a tone of compunction. "It is no wonder you do, I am sure, Mr. Peyton; but, fortunately for me, since I have to live among them, I do not own a superior intellect and super-refined tastes."

"Oh!" he ejaculated, but she turned towards her handmaid again, apparently without noticing that he had begun to speak.

"That is all, I think, Cinders. Ah! ask Mr. Rogers to call at Dwight's and say that if those ox-yokes don't come tomorrow I shall not take them. Tell Ninny she need not stop her preserve-boiling. I'll come out and make the biscuits for tea." Cinders departed, and Phillis continued, "I hope you like hot biscuits, Mr. Peyton? Oh! I forgot: if you have dyspepsia you ought to content yourself with stale bread."

"You poor fellow!" cried Georgia. "Bless me, how could you develop such a *commonplace* malady?"

"It is an unwarranted aspersion of Miss French's," said he.

"He refused buttermilk, Georgia. What other reason could he have?"

"None!" Miss Grosvenor pronounced decidedly. "Ah! here comes grandma."

The dainty little old lady, who greeted Peyton with such sweet cordiality, was as unlike that young gentleman's idea of "farmer-folk" as her grand-daughter, but her appearance took the conversation out of the domestic region in which Phillis would have found a malicious satisfaction in confining it. Maurice, who shared his sister's amiable habit of being attentive to age, devoted himself to the new-comer, and was able to revenge himself a little on the two girls for the recent teasing by somewhat ignoring their presence.

But he had the pleasure after a while of giving Georgia a surprise.

"There comes Mr. Bourke," she said. "Maurice, you will have an opportunity to make his acquaintance."

Peyton hurried down the steps, with both hands extended.

"Denis, old man!" he cried.

"Peyton, my dear fellow, I'm awfully glad to see you," returned Bourke, and the two shook hands warmly, while Georgia sat watching them with wide-opened eyes.

"Who ever would have dreamed of our next meeting being out here in the heart of Pennsylvania?" exclaimed Maurice.

"Perhaps you will be good enough to explain where your last one took place?" said Georgia, recovering her breath.

"You never told me you knew my brother, Mr. Bourke."

"Oh! you had forgotten," said Phillis; "just as Mr. Peyton forgot that you had told him I was not Miss Moreland."

"You are a wretched traitress!" said Georgia, and joined in the laughter of the others, although it was at her own expense.

CHAPTER XI.

It was rather late when the little party separated, considering that two of its members had duties which would necessitate their being astir in the morning.

The evening had been delightful to Peyton; the conversation of a nature to make him forget his puzzled wonderings in regard to the incongruity between Phillis French and her alleged occupations, as completely as it did the change between Bourke's present position and the surroundings in which they had last met.

After hearing Phillis sing in the most heavenly fashion, and then sitting with her in the porch, while the moonlight heightened and spiritualized her loveliness, it was rather a shock to be interrupted in a metaphysical discussion concerning Heine, and obliged to recollect that life held a very prosaic and commonplace side for her. Nay, destiny had gone further than a mere turning the poetry of her young existence into prose; she had shown herself a cruel, relentless taskmistress. This lovely creature was forced down to a level where she had to perform coarse physical labor, such as the fastidious young man would hitherto have pronounced impossible for a lady to endure,—meaning impossible mentally, I suppose, since, so far as bodily strength went, no more could be required than that expended by scores of his acquaintance on the ballroom or the hunting-field, or in any other haunt where idle people work so hard in pursuit of pleasure.

Denis Bourke it was who dragged him forth from dreamland. Peyton had lured Phillis into the porch under pretext of showing her some effect of moonlight, and detained her there in conversation; while Georgia and Bourke were fitfully trying old duets and glees at the piano, till at last Denis suddenly cried out,—

"This may answer for people of elegant leisure, but I know a young man who has to be up at daylight."

"And I know a young woman who is in the same predicament, for she *has soap to make*," rejoined Phillis. "If you *come to-morrow*, Mr. Peyton, you can have the pleasure of

improving your acquaintance with Miss Raines, for she has promised to assist in the operation. She may like Heine too, for what I know."

Georgia and Bourke came out into the veranda, and they all stood talking nonsense for a few moments; then the gentlemen took their departure.

Miss Grosvenor waited while Phillis closed the shutters and locked the hall door; then they went up the stairs together.

"You haven't told me how you like my brother?" said Georgia, as they reached her door.

"I haven't had time," said Phillis.

"To make up your mind?"

"Oh, you know I always do that at first glance,—for the pleasure of changing it."

"He is very handsome, is he not?"

"Yes; but, you see, I don't fancy handsome men."

"And he is a genius."

"And geniuses are always mad."

"Don't be a provoking P."

"I'm too sleepy; good-night!"

"Oh, dear! and I'm not a bit sleepy."

"That's because you have an ill-regulated mind," said Phillis. "Now let me go, else Ann Raines will get here before I am up in the morning."

"Admit that Maurice has fascinating manners."

"You might as well call him a demon at once," broke in Phillis, with one of the spasms of violence whereby she now and then startled Miss Grosvenor, from their contrast to her ordinary manner, and to her habit of jesting upon every possible subject, until ordinary acquaintances must have doubted whether she could ever speak or think seriously. "Heavens! Georgia, never say that of any person you want me even to tolerate! I loathe the very sound of the word!"

"What an odd girl you are!" exclaimed Miss Grosvenor, holding up her candle to look more closely at her friend. "I declare, sometimes you quite frighten me by glimpses of a P. French whom I don't in the least know."

"You must study her by daylight," returned Phillis. "Poor Georgia! after all these weeks you can still be taken in by my dramatics."

They exchanged good-nights and entered their respective

rooms. As Phillis put her light down, she caught sight of her own face in the mirror.

"Fascinating!" she repeated, with a shiver of disgust. "Oh, my petted, dainty Georgia, how little you know about this hard old world, after all! But come, P. French, it won't do to fall to thinking, else we shall have no rest, and we are going to make soap to-morrow, miss!"

She prepared for bed without delay, and, once there, kept repeating nonsense rhymes, till at length she fell asleep.

Phillis French had passed through very black waters, and, into the quiet haven she had reached, echoes from the awful tempest which had darkened her early girlhood still came up at intervals, presaging possible danger for the future. But she had done what was right; she had also guarded herself in every practicable way; and, thanks to her self-control, she could most of the time really be as cheerful as she appeared to others. Even when temporarily borne down by the weighty memories so dismal that they haunted her slumber like nightmares, or troubled by a dread that fresh suffering was at hand, she managed to conceal her disquietude, or else show it in a whimsical fashion which prevented those about her from regarding her excitement as serious.

"Now, what did she mean? or did she mean anything?" thought Georgia, as she stood before her toilet-table. Then she perceived a letter lying in the open drawer, which caused her to forget Phillis French and her oddities.

During the earlier weeks of her country sojourn, Mr. Caruthers's epistles had afforded Georgia a mild kind of pleasure; but, later, the consciousness of not having attempted the fulfilment of her promise, to give due consideration to the writer's desire of uniting their destinies, had sorely detracted from any satisfaction in the perusal of his communications.

During this last month Mr. Caruthers's letters had grown more frequent; and the two received within the fortnight had changed Georgia's passive gratification into positive disquiet. It seemed to her that the tone had altered strangely, going so far even as to imply that she had pledged herself to much more than was really the case; and Aunt Conyngham wrote in the same fashion, only with greater frankness.

It was a very unwise move on Mr. Caruthers's part, and

entirely inexcusable in a woman so experienced as Aunt Conyngham; but occasionally that wary lady, after having systematically followed out a plan of action for months and months, would be seized with an impulse of haste, and upset her projects by some ill-advised step like the present.

The letters caused Georgia to feel that she was unjustly treated; that her liberty of action was being tampered with,—an attempt, indeed, being made to fetter her; and nothing could have been more unfortunate for Mr. Caruthers, or more disastrous to his hopes, than rousing such a suspicion in her mind. It was doubly unfortunate that the allies had chosen this precise time for changing their tactics, because, when the month opened, Georgia, without yet beginning to give serious reflection to the subject, had reached a point when she vaguely admitted to herself that somewhere in the future an acceptance of Mr. Caruthers's proposal seemed the one possible and fitting culmination of her destiny.

To-night the recollection of these later letters vexed and distracted her. To get away from thought she sat down by the window, after having extinguished her candle, and remained there for a long while gazing out into the night. She had meant to fix her mind upon the pretty scene; but instead of doing so, she fell to dreaming in a fashion almost unknown in her experience of sweet and enticing chances; of the happiness which women must know who were young and fresh enough in feeling to fall in love,—to love, no matter at what cost, with a strength and passion which the need of sacrifice only increased.

In the mean time, her brother and Denis Bourke had walked homeward through the fields, stopping now and then to light a pipe or to admire some wonderful effect of moonlight on upland or wood, and discoursing in the frank way in which men who really like each other are able to do after a long separation, when neither has any special secret to keep, and so each is relieved from the necessity of guarding against the fear that some inadvertent speech may rouse suspicion in the listener's mind—trebly acute through sympathy—that a chord is amiss somewhere.

"I say, old man, this coming together again is very pleasant," Maurice began, as they crossed the stile in the first meadow.

"Very," Bourke replied; "and as improbable as pleasant."

"Oh, I don't know. Nothing more natural than that we should meet," rejoined Peyton. "People are always turning up everywhere. If I go to Cairo I'm sure to encounter fellows I left in Charleston or some other equally distant place."

"You feel so because you are a confirmed wanderer and have lost the faculty of surprise. It is different with a man who plods on in one quiet spot, as I do here; even a little event seems an adventure of importance."

"Any way, losing the faculty of surprise does not involve losing the power of being glad," said Peyton, cordially. "I liked you immensely; and I had reason."

"Yes, if liking demands liking," laughed Denis.

"I understand. Allowing one to thank you was never in your line. Well, on the whole, I think I am very magnanimous not to hate you, considering that you once did me a great favor."

"Favor be blowed!" cried Denis. "Say what you please, it did seem uncommonly odd when Miss Grosvenor suddenly told me your name. I dare say she had spoken of her brother, but, naturally, I took it for granted he shared her cognomen."

"So you have been here several years?"

"Over four."

"But how the dickens did it happen that you ever found your way?"

"Oh, once this side of the big pond, it happened naturally enough," Bourke replied, carelessly.

"Hang it, man, can't you see I'm dying to hear how the first happening came about, and am afraid of appearing curious?—though you will not believe it mere curiosity which makes me wish to learn the story."

"Not much of a story, my boy," returned Denis, knocking the ashes out of his pipe against a convenient tree. "I had very little money left, and it was necessary to do something. I thought of Australia,—took my passage,—changed my mind at the last moment,—disposed of my berth, and steamed over to America instead; following my Paddy instincts, I suppose."

"Well?"

"No, it wasn't well. A New York broker, whom I had known, *persuaded me to speculate in some infernal stock.* I

was to 'realize' I don't know how much, but there proved to be a slight mistake; it was the chaps on the other side of the stock who did that, and I lost my money."

"A nice go that."

"On the whole, it was," said Denis, in a philosophical tone; "for I heard of this farm, and put my remaining spondulix into it in order to keep it safe; and it is very safe. I couldn't get it out again if I wished."

"It makes you a living?"

"I live like a fighting-cock; only my battles are with labor; but I work no harder than a hunting man does."

"How did you lose your money in the first place? The turf, I suppose?"

Bourke had filled his pipe again, and was lighting it. Peyton accepted his silence as an assent.

"But the uncle. Did he sit quiet and see you go to the dogs?" continued Peyton.

"Oh, here! I'm a tax-payer and a respectable citizen. Don't talk about my having gone to the dogs!" laughed Bourke. "The uncle—sit quiet! My dear fellow, he kicked me out neck and crop, and politely told me to go to—well, a worse place than you suggested."

"The old sea-serpent!"

"You see, he always hated me; that was natural. I always wanted to return the sentiment, but somehow I could never get beyond indifference, which, considering the circumstances, was decidedly unnatural," Denis explained, in that matter-of-fact tone which sometimes irritated Georgia. "There, that's the end of fyte the first. I landed in Yankeedoodledum. It's the end of the story, for that matter, for nothing has happened since worth the chronicleing. Here we are at the house, and heartily welcome you are, old chap."

Peyton perceived that he had revealed as much as he desired to do, and, of course, further question was impossible. They entered the room in which hung the portrait that resembled Miss Grosvenor, and for a few moments sat there in silence, Bourke absently gazing at the picture, which the lamp-light brought out in full relief, and Peyton occupied with his sympathetic wonderings in regard to his friend's troubles in the old home across seas.

"*It is an uncommonly rum world,*" Maurice at length ob-

served, with the inelegance of expression so frequently affected by the elegant young men of our day, though the same terms from the mouth of a person not "of their class" would be regarded as a proof of the speaker's hopeless vulgarity. "An uncommonly rum world."

"Not half a bad world, though," returned Bourke. "But you have not told me what you've been doing in it since we lost sight of each other."

"Oh, wandering up and down the face of the earth, like Satan in the book of Job," said Peyton; "trying to amuse myself, and succeeding pretty well too. You know I never went in for the *blasé* dodge."

"If you hadn't happened to be unlucky enough to own a big fortune, you'd have got far on the road to fame before this," said Bourke. "You have painted a picture or two, I know, because I've seen them noticed; but painting now and then in a *dilettante* fashion isn't work."

"I never thought it was, you incorrigible old preacher."

"But what I want to get at is, what you have felt,—what has happened to you. Not Maurice the exquisite, but the real man inside."

"Nothing; just the old story. You can imagine it easily enough. Nothing new ever happens. Yes, by Jove! there does sometimes. For instance, stumbling on a girl like Miss French. Who is she?—what is she?—how the deuce does she come to be living here?"

"The reason seems obvious enough; because it is her home."

"You know what I mean. How the dickens does it happen to be her home? One would as soon expect to find a nightingale in a hen's nest."

"You a painter, and malign that lovely old place of hers!"

"The place is a gem, like its owner. But it's humbug, isn't it, about her managing the farm, and all that?"

"Not a bit of it; she's the best farmer in the county. Why, she can turn her hand to anything. Luckily, she is not called on often to do much more than superintend, but there's nothing she can't do, from ironing clothes to mending a rake."

"But there's something dreadful in the idea of a woman like her being brought down to commonplace duties."

"She isn't brought down; she raises them to her level, and turns them into poetry."

"That's no go, you know. I don't believe a word. The ideal shepherdess is very pretty, but when you reduce her to reality she becomes a very heavy-footed, hard-handed damsel."

"Oh, P. French's hands—"

"Awfully pretty!"

"Exactly. After all, her hard work hardens the ends of her fingers no more than playing the harp does a fine lady's."

"But her education,—her accomplishments?"

"Plenty of good schools to be found everywhere in America."

"Yes; but her elegance, her style? You don't mean to tell me, I suppose, that many dairy-women are like her?"

"Oh, nature has a way of her own of managing things. How often you have seen a *roturier* look like a duke, and the descendant of a hundred earls like a clown!"

Peyton did not even hear, he was so busy trying to find some comparison for this bewitching creature, who had at first sight taken so powerful a hold upon his excitable fancy.

"She's like nobody, in a book or out, after all," he said, suddenly. "Though, I don't know; well, perhaps some of Shakespeare's women modernized—say, Miranda, with a good deal of Beatrice's devilment in her, or—"

"Oh, come!" interrupted Bourke. "If you begin in that fashion, you'll keep me here till morning. Let me show you the rookery I have got in order for your accommodation."

They went up-stairs, and, after a little more pleasant talk, Denis bade his friend good-night, and betook himself to his chamber, shaking his head now and then, and frowning portentously, after a habit he had when deep in thought.

But as he got into bed his meditations apparently had reached a tolerable satisfactory point, for he muttered,—

"If he flirts, he can't hurt Phillis: she is too thoroughly on her guard,—knows too well that she mustn't get in earnest. As for him, he's the best fellow in the world, but he will never be seriously hit: so I needn't worry over either of them."

With which philosophical and thoroughly masculine view of the subject that had occupied his thoughts, Master Denis *speedily* addressed himself to sleep.

CHAPTER XII.

It was still early, even according to country habits, when Peyton went down-stairs the next morning, but Bourke had already left the house.

"Ye see, sir, av he busies himself for a few days, he'll be quite at his aise for taking a little divarsion, and there's a power o' quail and partridges coming," Patrick explained, as, after offering his master's excuses for his departure, he ushered the guest into the room, where a tempting breakfast awaited him. "It's hopin' I am that ye'll divart yoursilf enough to keep Masther Dinis company for a month or two, sir."

"Oh, I don't mean to go away till he sends me off, Patrick," replied Peyton, who, like most desperately proud people, secure of their own position, was always gracious to inferiors.

After he had drunk his coffee, Maurice sauntered about the house and grounds for a while, smoking a matutinal calumet, charmed with everything he saw, though his observation of exterior objects was a good deal blunted by an absurd wonder which kept dancing to and fro in his head, whether Miss French would look as lovely in the morning as she had done on the previous evening, and if there was depth enough to her character to render her grace and wit interesting for any length of time.

He suddenly remembered that Georgia had said he could come for her to walk as early as he pleased. His watch informed him that it was now half-past seven, so he might as well go; destiny would perhaps reward his brotherly attention by a sight of Phillis French, although even in the country one could not ostensibly pay a visit at that unholy hour.

He took the path through the wood and fields, but was so immersed in idle, pleasant reflections, interspersed with contemplation of the lovely landscape and much lazy watching of the crows, that he strayed into a lane which brought him out below the grounds and close to the barn and carriage-house. There was another small building in the same enclosure, all hidden from the garden by a row of pollard willows, and,

hearing a tremendous clucking and crowing and flapping of wings, Maurice opened the gate and entered.

A few steps forward afforded him a view of Phillis French feeding her poultry, which she had just let out of their dwelling for a run in the yard, the palings being too high for any possibility of escape on their part.

"Good-morning, Mr. Peyton," called Phillis. "Don't come any nearer, or you'll frighten my family and so lose the pleasure of seeing them eat. Luckily for you, I am more than an hour late, though the poor things are half starved in consequence."

The fowls were in a wonderful state of excitement; they flew about her head, and perched on the edge of her basket; old hens fought for good places for their chickens, ducks quacked, turkeys gobbled, and some of the pigeons sailed over from the dovecote and mixed with the crowd, though it was evident that they despised the whole set. And as Phillis pointed out to Peyton when she had flung the last grains among her troop and joined him, the hens in turn looked down upon the turkeys, though these latter were so magnificent in their arrogance that they never perceived the contempt; while the entire society united in ignoring the ducks, who seemed to congratulate themselves on speaking a separate language.

"I have never been able to tell whether turkeys are idiots or poets," Phillis said, looking so desperately pretty in her simple chintz costume that Peyton decided he had not even done justice to her charms on the previous evening.

"Perhaps a combination of the two, like many human verse-makers," he suggested.

"The old gobblers are simply imbecile with pride," continued Phillis. "It is the most absurd performance to see two of them getting ready for a battle. During the first hour they'll strut up and down parallel to each other, their tails spreading wider and wider and their wattles growing redder and redder; but when they do begin, you can't separate them. It's the hen-turkeys that are the poets. You'll see one of them stand in a pouring rain, staring up at the sky, and letting the brood cry 'weet, weet,' and catch their deaths without her knowing it."

"Dear me! is that the way female poets behave?" asked Maurice.

"If they do, you men could not blame them, since you say women are only imitators of your sex when they go beyond small talk and mild pianoforte-playing," replied Phillis. "But don't be satirical early in the morning: it's wicked, you know, or, if you don't, you ought to. Just look at that superb cock; he's my bonniest. Did you ever see such a gorgeous creature? His name is Prince Beautiful, and he comes when I call him."

"So do most creatures, I imagine."

"La! is that a compliment?" she inquired, with a delicious affectation of rusticity in voice and face,—so perfect, too, that anybody who had never seen her till that instant would have sworn it was patural. "My grandma wouldn't like it; she said last night that young city men were as dangerous as my old Potiphar—that's the big turkey-gobbler there that's biting his newest wife; he's the crossdest old chap in existence."

"Be merciful, and I'll never err again!" cried Maurice, laughing.

"At least please work up to such poetical speeches by degrees: don't overwhelm my country innocence by bursting out all at once in your full splendor," she continued, mercilessly.

"I thought you told us you were to make soap this morning? That's being practical enough, I hope," returned he, a good deal amused, but still sufficiently teased by her railery to want to end it. "I felt certain yesterday that all your talk about work was a pretence, and here you are amusing yourself with your chickens."

"I was, till you came to amuse me," she replied. "The soap was in process of making three hours ago: that's the reason I happened to neglect my family. It must be nearly boiled enough by this time. We'll go and see presently, and you shall have an improving conversation with Miss Raines."

"The ogress I saw yesterday? Heaven forbid!"

"Oh, yes, you will," she persisted; "but it is a pleasure that must be deferred, because there's a hen's nest I want to find. Marie Antoinette and the Queen of Sheba have united to deceive me. They are hiding their eggs somewhere. Cinder has hunted, Ninny has hunted, and so has Mr. Sykes. Now you and I will take the matter in hand, and see if our combined intellects are a match for two pullets."

"But where are we to look?"

"First in the grass yonder; then you must turn over those old barrels; and then we'll try the barn," said Phillis, as gravely as if she were proposing a search for a lost child.

They hunted in every nook and corner, while a little knot of hens, headed by the two queens Phillis had named, followed them about and exchanged remarks in an undertone, looking so contemptuous that it was plain their observations were of a disparaging nature.

"I am sure they are laughing at our stupidity," Phillis said. "Now we will try the barn."

"Oh, certainly," returned Maurice, cheerfully, though in his heart he thought the chase had been sufficiently prolonged, for he was getting very warm, and had to exercise a great deal of care, to Phillis's secret delectation, in preserving his immaculate white serge suit from dust or rent while stooping among the casks and inserting himself into spaces much too small for his person. Wherever she perceived a hole or corner difficult to get into and more difficult to get out of, Phillis became immediately confident that precise spot must hold the hidden treasure, and she ordered him to investigate it, with a tyranny as relentless as it was graceful and coquettish. And now, having exhausted the difficulties of the yard, she took the path towards the barn.

"We are certain to find it here," she said, as they reached the door. "Oh, good gracious, it is locked! Just put your hand between the boards. Sykes must have put the key there."

Maurice obeyed, but withdrew his hand empty.

"Sykes must have put the key in his pocket," he observed, and tried hard to conceal his satisfaction, but Phillis perceived it, and was determined not to let him off so easily.

"After all, I dare say the nest is in the carriage-house," said she: "Sheba made one there last year. Dear me! in Bible days it was Solomon ~~bothered~~ Sheba, and now it is Sheba who is too much for Solomon!"

"Too much for the female sex also, in your person," returned he.

"Ah, I can bear it, because it gives me a high opinion of the resources of feminine nature," said Phillis.

She led the way round to the side of the yard upon which *the carriage-house* doors opened, Maurice devoutly hoping that

Sykes might have locked them too, and carried off the key; but no, they stood invitingly ajar.

The ample space within could boast no vehicles, except a cart and the pony-wagon, and in one corner was heaped a pile of mattresses which Mr. Sykes had been filling with straw and had not yet carried over to his house. The room was well lighted and very lofty. Some fifteen feet above the floor a beam stretched from end to end of the chamber, and between ten and twelve feet higher a platform stored with hay ran along one side of the building, attainable by means of a ladder.

There were a good many places to search upon the ground, but, when they had all been inspected without success, Phillis glanced towards the ladder and then regarded Maurice with an engaging smile. He knew that his fate was sealed. She had forced him already into numerous ridiculous positions, but of all sights a long-legged man mounting a long, narrow ladder is the most ridiculous, as he was well aware.

"The nest is not down here, that is certain," said Phillis, in her softest voice; and again she gazed at the ladder, and again smiled sweetly at him.

"Do you think it is up there?" he inquired, in a tone which showed that he expected her to reply in the negative.

"I've not a doubt of it," she answered, with an air of profound conviction; "not a shadow of doubt."

"I don't believe that two such sensible fowls as their majesties would take so much unnecessary trouble," said he.

"Oh, it is only men that mind trouble," Phillis replied.

"Now, do you really want to see me look perfectly absurd going up that ladder?" he asked, laughing.

"I want you to go up, most certainly. I don't insist on your looking absurd," rejoined Phillis, with gravity.

"But—"

"We will find the nest first, and argue afterwards," she interrupted. "Somebody must mount, and I can't. Unless you are in the same predicament, I wish you would do it."

Maurice gave her a glance half of amusement, half of vexation, and strode towards the ladder; but just as he reached it a boy of fifteen put a sandy head and a mischievous face in at the door, and called,—

"Oh, Miss French, I've been a hunting you high and low! Please can't I speak to you a minute? fur it's most partic'lar."

"What do you want, Joe Grimshaw?" she asked. "I am sure you haven't brought me a telegram."

"I've got no telegrams for nobody, and don't mean to no more," returned the boy, who had walked in and was standing before her. He ended his sentence with three emphatic nods, and then looked round for a peep at Maurice. "That's Miss Gros-ve-nor's brother," he added: "I seed him yesterday."

"I suppose you didn't come to give me that information, Joe?" said Phillis. "What do you mean by saying you shall carry no more despatches?"

"I wanted to ask if you hadn't some odd jobs fur me. I kin turn my hand to a'most anything, Miss French, and, whatever I be, I ain't lazy, you'll own that," said Joe, eagerly.

"Oh, Joe! What have you been doing? I hope you've not been sent away from the office!" cried Phillis.

"I've sent the office adrift, and I don't pertend to go back to it," said Joe, stoutly, though, in spite of the energy of his language, his manner to his interlocutor was perfectly respectful. "I kin stand a good deal, but when it comes to bein' told I'm no better'n a thief, and cat-hauled about by old Tom Potter—why, that upsets the bilin', and I know you'll say so too, Miss Phillis."

"Is Tom Potter the clerk in the telegraph office, my boy?" Maurice asked, unable to repress a smile.

"Yes, sir, he is; and he's the very chap that tried to be slacky to you last night when you came in with Mr. Bourke to send the telegram, and if you'd kicked him, instead of jest hammerin' his head a bit agin the wall, he wouldn't have got half what he deserves."

"Never mind that," said Maurice. "Tell us about your misunderstanding with the gentleman."

"Oh, I understand it all clear enough," cried Joe. "This is the way it was, Miss Phillis. Last night in comes Mr. Mozier, the storekeeper, in a wax, and he says to Potter, 'You're a pooty fellow, you are. I've just got a letter to say a telegram was despatched yesterday morning, and you've never sent it round.' Potter he got very red, and says he, 'I did. It's all that blasted boy's fault. He's lost it.' And then says I, 'You're another. You never give me no telegram for Mr. Mozier.'"

"Well, you had not lost it?" demanded Phillis.

"Not a lose! I hadn't had it!" shouted Joe. "After a good deal of jawin', I just jumped over the counter into his place, and afore he could stop me I'd upset the waste-paper basket, and there it was. He'd put it into a 'welope and directed it, and then forgot, and it got husked off his desk. He tried to grab it, and said it wasn't that, but I threw it over to Mr. Mezier."

"Well?"

"Mozier he went off swearin', and then Potter lit on me; but he didn't make twice out of that," said Joe, triumphantly: "so then I threw up the sitivation, for the same thing has happened afore and I was blamed. This time he got found out, and I says to myself the best thing for me is to git up and git afore he fetches me into some scrape, and mother she said so too."

"I am very sorry, Joe," said Phillis.

"It's all just as I've told it, Miss French: you can ask Mr. Mozier," cried Joe, anxiously.

"I know that: you always tell the truth," said Phillis.

Joe's face at once lost the defiant expression it had worn while detailing his wrongs; his features worked, and it was plain that he had hard work to keep back his tears. But he shook himself, and gave a furtive punch to the straw hat he held, and so managed to preserve his stoicism.

"What makes me sorry, Joe, is that I've no work for you," Phillis explained, kindly. "Sykes hired a fresh boy the other day, and I thought him one hand more than we needed."

Joe looked so crestfallen that Maurice felt as sorry for him as Phillis did. He went up to her, and said, in a low tone,—

"Denis was saying last night that we should want a lad to carry our guns and do all sorts of errands: the one he has had has been ill, it seems. Shall I take this chap?"

"You couldn't find a better boy than Joe," returned Phillis: "he is mischievous, but industrious, and honesty itself. Do take the poor fellow."

If she had asked him to accept the charge of a white elephant and several Siamese families into the bargain, Maurice could not have refused when she spoke in that tone and regarded him with such eagerly pleading eyes. He turned back to Joe, who was watching their brief colloquy with undisguised interest.

"What do you say to my hiring you for a few weeks?" he asked. "You will have to be ready to do anything and everything, you know."

Joe's gray eyes shone with delight, but he did not even smile.

"Miss Phillis 'll tell you if I'm handy and willin'," he said, suddenly growing a little embarrassed. "I know I'd like dreadfully to come, if you'll take me, sir."

"Then it's a bargain. About the wages, we must consult Mr. Bourke," added Maurice.

"Fix it anyhow you like; it'll be all hunkey, I know," cried Joe, at last showing two rows of white teeth in a broad grin.

"That is settled," said Phillis. "Now, Mr. Peyton, we can remember the Queen of Sheba and the ascent to her palace."

Maurice fancied that he saw an easy way out of his difficulty.

"Then you are engaged, Joe. I'll take you from this morning," he said.

"Right agin," returned Joe. "I'm engaged, and I'll be as engagin' as the school-ma'am when examination-day comes, and all the beaux is bobbin' about the place."

"Then," said Maurice, carelessly, "you may begin your service by hunting a hen's nest up in the loft yonder."

"Not a bit of it!" cried Phillis before the boy could speak. "You hire Joe to do your work, Mr. Peyton; he can't do mine. You engaged yourself for that hen's-nest hunting, and I hold you to your bargain."

"But, since I can do the business by proxy much more thoroughly than I could perform it myself—" he suggested.

"It would not answer the purpose," Phillis replied, with decision. "A bargain is a bargain."

"What a Shylock disposition!" said he, laughing. "Well, will to-morrow answer?"

But Phillis did not laugh; she looked grave enough,—even vexed and contemptuous, he thought.

"Do you or do you not mean to keep your promise, Mr. Peyton?" she asked.

"Upon my word," he exclaimed, still laughing, but a good deal irritated, "I have seen a great many unreasonable young women—"

"And now you see a reasonable one," she broke in. "A promise is a promise, be the matter involved big or little."

"Oh, if you take the affair so seriously. You really insist on my going up that ladder?"

"Of course, if there is any danger of your falling—" replied she.

The sentence was not clear, but the expression of her face made it evident she meant to suggest that he was afraid. Peyton flushed a little; he was almost angry. Phillis saw it, and chuckled inwardly; she had been trying from the first to make him lose his temper.

Joe Grimshaw had retreated a little, so that he could lean comfortably against the cart. There he stood, chewing a wisp of straw, and apparently neither heeding nor understanding their conversation; but the twinkle in his eyes betrayed him.

Maurice strode to the ladder and began to mount. He had scarcely ascended half a dozen rounds when his coat caught upon a nail. He extricated it impatiently and flung it down on the floor. Joe Grimshaw picked up the garment, dusted it, and laid it on the seat of the pony-carriage with as much care as if it had been a baby. He looked preternaturally grave, but in order to do so he was obliged to pucker his mouth into such odd shapes that Phillis had much ado to keep from laughing.

Peyton appeared as little absurd as a man could under the circumstances, for he went up the ladder as nimbly as a sailor or a monkey.

Had Phillis known what a finished gymnast he was, she would have cast about for some other means of vexing him.

Peyton reached the loft and disappeared for some instants behind the heap of hay. Presently he emerged towards the farther end, and called,—

"No signs of the Queen of Sheba's habitation, Miss French."

"You are sure you have searched carefully?"

"Quite sure."

"Then you may come down. We will try the barn tomorrow."

"I only promised you the carriage-house," said he.

The boards extended perhaps eighteen inches beyond the

beams which supported them, and he was standing on the very edge.

"Oh, Mr. Peyton, take care!" Phillis exclaimed, in an altered voice. "You are awfully high up: I didn't know it was so far."

She was alarmed by his carelessness; he determined to tease her a little, by way of having revenge.

"I rather like the altitude, now I am here," said he, walking lightly along. "Don't you want to come up?"

"Please go farther back—please!" cried Phillis.

He laughed heartily at her distress, still advancing. He reached a place where the hay had been removed; one of the planks was loose; it bent under his weight,—bent so far that he could not spring back. Peyton heard Phillis utter a cry, echoed by Joe Grimshaw's voice. He looked down,—saw the beam which traversed the room a good ten feet below: a vigorous leap might enable him to attain it.

There was not even a second in which to deliberate: he took in the situation at a glance. His gymnastic training stood him in good stead; he stepped more heavily to give the board greater sway and himself more impetus, jumped, swung through the dizzy space, caught the beam with both hands, threw one leg over it in a flash, and sat still for a moment to recover his breath.

"Joe, Joe, the ladder!" shrieked Phillis.

Joe ran to fetch it, but, tug and pull as he might, with Phillis in her terrified impatience rushing to help, the ladder was so firmly nailed at top and bottom that their united strength availed nothing.

"Good heavens! there's not another long enough!" cried Phillis. "Joe, run for a hammer. Don't move, Mr. Peyton! don't!"

"Stop where you are, Joe!" ordered Maurice. "I'm not going to wait here an hour while you unfasten the ladder! There's no danger, Miss French!"

He rose to his feet and walked along the narrow beam with as much composure as if he had been treading a floor.

"By ginger! he is a plucky one! What a head!" exclaimed Joe.

"All the same, Joe, I don't care to do circus for your amusement any longer," laughed Peyton, overhearing the in-

voluntarily-uttered tribute to his coolness. "Lay two or three of those mattresses on the ground: I can jump down then."

"You can't! you can't!" groaned Phillis. "Don't try! don't!"

"I can do it easily, I assure you," he replied.

Joe seized a mattress and Phillis one, which they dragged under the spot where Peyton stood, and heaped two others above them.

"Push them farther out, Joe," he called. "I am going to jump, not fall."

They obeyed, in their haste not noticing that the beds were too close to the cart. Maurice was so occupied in watching Phillis that he did not observe it either. He jumped, and landed on his feet, but his left arm struck the wheel with such force that he would have fallen had he not caught the spokes with his right hand.

There was an instant's silence. Phillis had sat down flat upon the mattress, white as a sheet.

"Wal, I never see the beat of that, even with them trapeze chaps that was here last summer!" Joe Grimshaw exclaimed, in admiring tones, which suddenly changed to alarm as he cried out, "Oh, Mr. Peyton, you've hurt your arm! it's a bleeding!"

Phillis started up at once, her presence of mind quite restored by the idea that she could be of service.

"It's nothing," Peyton said, glancing at his shirt-sleeve, through which the blood was oozing.

"Bring that stool, Joe," was all Phillis said. Joe obeyed, and she added, "Sit down, Mr. Peyton."

He obeyed too. Phillis unbuttoned his wristband and rolled up the sleeve; the cut was not deep, but the arm was already turning black from the bruise.

"You are sure it is not broken?" she asked, in a choked voice.

"Good heavens! no: it's nothing whatever! See, I can move it with perfect ease," he said, though the doing so made him wince a little.

Joe Grimshaw flew out to the horse-trough in the yard, and came back with a basin of water. Phillis wet her pocket-handkerchief and carefully washed the hurt, Peyton yielding to her ministrations with praiseworthy submission, and think-

ing, even while he laughed and jested to relieve her mind, that he would willingly have borne a wound more severe for the pleasure of feeling the touch of her pretty fingers and watching the pain and solicitude which softened her eyes. But the blood would not stop flowing, and Phillis perceived that she must resort to other measures.

"Run to the house, Joe," she said, "and tell Cinders I want you to get me something out of the press in the store-room. Don't say a word else."

"No, ma'am," said Joe.

"On the top shelf you'll find a roll of adhesive plaster: bring it, and be quick!"

Away sped Joe. Phillis asked Peyton for his handkerchief, which she bound tightly above the hurt, then held his arm firmly in both hands, too much engrossed to remember that the situation was somewhat peculiar.

They both remained silent for a few moments; at length Phillis said,—

"I—I'm so sorry! I beg your pardon, Mr. Peyton."

But he only teased and laughed at her, in a fashion which proved him an adept in the line she was herself so proficient in. Joe performed his errand in an incredibly brief space of time, and Phillis produced a pair of scissors from her pocket, with which she cut some slips of the plaster.

"Find the lantern, Joe, and light the candle," was her next command.

This being done, she warmed the strips to make them stick, and disposed them about the wound in a very scientific manner. She had to try several bits before she succeeded; but at length the flow of blood was checked, and Peyton able to resume his coat.

"Georgia will never forgive me," faltered Phillis.

"Then we'll not tell her or anybody," said Maurice, gayly. "I say, Joe, if you open your mouth I'll—what was it you said the irate Mr. Potter did to you?"

"Cat-hauled me about," responded Joe, involuntarily clinching his fist at the recollection.

"Well, whatever that may be, I'll do something worse if you tell I hurt my arm," laughed Peyton.

"I won't, sir," said Joe, "but I know I shall tell about the *jump*. It ain't no use to promise,—not if you thumped me

blacker and bluer than that there arm o' yourn ; for I know I should. But there won't a feller at the Corners believe me when I tell 'em : so you needn't mind."

"No wonder if they don't," said Phillis, glancing up at the beam with a shiver.

"That's all right, then," rejoined Peyton ; and, by way of finding an excuse to get rid of the lad, he added, "Now go to the post-office, Joe, and see if there are any letters for me. You can take them up to Mr. Bourke's house, and wait till I come."

Joe departed ; and, between delight at having found a situation so quickly, and the excitement of witnessing his new employer's acrobatic feat, he was so exultant that he ran some distance before he remembered he had meant to ask a favor. Back he dashed, and met the pair at the door.

"Ef you ain't in a hurry, may I go and tell mother I'm hired?" he asked. "She's been so kind o' oneasy in her mind, Mr. Peyton."

"Go, of course," Maurice answered, and Joe flew off again. "Upon my word," Peyton continued, "I like that trait in the boy."

"Joe is as good as gold," pronounced Phillis, "and so quick and intelligent that one can't scold him for his mischief."

"You must have rather a fellow-feeling for him, so far as that goes," returned Maurice, maliciously.

"Your arm doesn't pain you much? You are sure the hurt will be nothing?" she asked, brought back to solicitude by his words.

"Nothing at all," he replied ; and now he ventured to add, softly, almost tenderly, "If the hurt had been ten times worse, I should have been amply repaid by your care and sympathy."

He looked down at her, as he spoke, with eloquent eyes, which had wrought trouble in many a woman's heart ; for it was as natural to Maurice Peyton to flirt as it was to breathe.

Phillis's face changed, as if by magic. She looked more wicked than he had yet seen her, and began to laugh.

"Now that the danger is over, one must own it was all very absurd," said she. "You did look so droll going up the ladder. When Joe tells about the leap, people will decide that you are a circus-performer. They already think Georgia a

public singer. I dare say you'll both get into the *Wachusett Times*. How pleased your aunt will be!"

Peyton was too wise to persist in trying, as many men would have done, to give the conversation a sentimental turn. He met her on her own ground; and when half an hour later they reached the house and found Georgia, they were rallying each other with the freedom of two old friends, and she was charmed to find what progress they had made in their acquaintance.

Maurice's arm was so stiff that he could not conceal the fact of having received a hurt, but he allowed Georgia to think it had happened in Bourke's stable, and it was not until it got well—an operation which took several days—that she learned how it really occurred, and then through a mock-tragic confession on Phillis's part.

She and Joe both proved correct in their conjectures: when the boy told the story of the leap, the people at the Corners unanimously declared that Bourke's visitor must be "a furrin tight-rope walker," and at the same time were equally unanimous in refusing to credit the tale, in consequence whereof Joe got into half a dozen personal conflicts with lads much bigger than himself, but, as he came off victorious on each occasion, he did not mind.

Phillis insisted on Peyton's inspecting the soap, and doomed him for a full quarter of an hour to endure the clatter of Miss Raines's tongue, then ran off, to his great disappointment, on the plea of important duties.

He remained until Georgia told him he must go, because it was luncheon-time, and he departed, fearing that he should not be gratified by another sight of the young mistress of the dwelling, but as he passed the kitchen she came out and whispered, with a rueful face,—

"I'm afraid your arm is very painful?"

"Indeed it is not," he averred, though somewhat untruthfully.

"I am so sorry it happened," she added.

"And I am glad," he answered, with so much meaning that she deferred her contrition for solitary musings, transformed herself at once into a Nix, and teased him more unmercifully than ever.

CHAPTER XIII.

THAT Maurice Peyton had been able to endure so much spoiling, and come out so little injured thereby, was a proof that his character possessed qualities unusually strong and sterling, for the guides of his childhood and the friends of the later portion of his pilgrimage, which had lasted some eight-and-twenty years, had certainly done their best to ruin him.

His widowed mother had married again when he was a boy of five, and had taken her son to her new home in England. Young as he was, Maurice had bitterly resented his parent's second marriage, but his delight in the baby-sister, born a twelvemonth after, reconciled him thereto, and the doting tenderness he received from his stepfather gradually roused a corresponding affection in his impulsive nature.

Since seventeen he had known no guide but his own will, wherewith his nominal guardian was too weak and indolent to cope. His school-days had passed at Harrow; in accordance with a promise he had made his mother, he returned to America and entered Harvard; was rusticated before he had half finished his course; went back to England, and distinguished himself at Oxford, though not altogether in the way which wise people might have thought desirable; for there were few eccentricities and extravagances which he did not perpetrate, condescending to just sufficient effort in his studies to show what he might have achieved had he been disposed.

Since then he had lived principally in the great European capitals, where his talents, his handsome face, and his wealth had given him an enviable position. Women had courted him and committed insane follies on his account, as idle, pampered society dames will for a man who acquires the reputation of being dangerous; but, though Maurice's career had been anything but a model, the makings of a cold-blooded *roué* were not in his composition, and his reverence for his mother's memory, and his chivalrous devotion to his sister, kept alive a *respect* towards their sex which, unhappily,

the conduct of too many women of the world helps rapidly to dissipate from the minds of young men.

He had as many half-playfully-expressed cynical theories as Georgia, but they went no deeper than hers, and in one particular he was more honest than she: he always declared himself capable of a love that would be lasting, and only despaired of finding the object upon whom his serene highness might worthily lavish the gift.

Flirt he must and would, but it was to be said in his favor that he had never been guilty of attempting to win the affection of any innocent, truthful girl for his own amusement; and there was reason in his creed, that girls angling for such husbands deserved small mercy, and married women who flirted, none whatever. As he said, the latter must, voluntarily and with wide-open eyes, go out of their way to reach a point where a man ventures to profess love for them, and must have as thoroughly lost all decent and virtuous principle as a woman who has really broken the seventh commandment, when they can get far enough in the mental keeping of their marriage vows to find pleasure in knowing that a man would make love if he dared, yet deeming themselves pure because they stop short of the irrevocable precipice, a descent down which would at least prove that they possessed hearts and passions and so owned some trace of humanity, instead of being as unwomanly as the sirens of old, as hideous in the sight of any clean-minded person as a whited sepulchre filled with all possible nauseousness of decay.

Phillis French had been a new revelation to Georgia, but she was a more wonderful one to Maurice; for he knew even less than his sister of the manner in which people live and are educated in America, outside of a certain privileged set.

Like most young men who have acquired varied experiences, Peyton had been in the habit of thinking he understood women; but Phillis French proved a puzzle he found it impossible to elucidate. He could not even approach near enough to a solution to decide when she was in jest or in earnest, and in the early days of their acquaintance he gave up all hope of ever finding out her state of mind if she chose to guard the secret.

He was charmed with the friendship which grew speedily *up between them*; and yet it piqued him, half unconsciously,

that she should be as easy in his society as if he were his own grandfather.

Phillis French appeared to receive his attentions as a matter of course, not as a right,—that would have been oppressive,—but as something too natural to deserve a second thought, and, worse still, as if she had been so surfeited by devotion that half the time it was only good nature which made her endure it.

But apart from this phase of their acquaintance, and her unmerciful ridicule of any approach to sentiment, their intercourse was as frank and open as it could be between two youthful persons of opposite sex.

When both chanced to be in a rational mood, they could talk sense, read books, discuss grave subjects; but, as a rule, the demon of mischief would take possession of one or the other in the very height of their seriousness, and they finally agreed that it was better to leave weighty topics to Georgia and Bourke, since they never tired of debating thereon.

Phillis was the first woman Peyton had ever met who possessed the ability really to tease him; scores of other women had vexed, excited, and, in turn, wearied his capricious fancy; but Phillis could tease him, and that power, along with the impossibility of ever telling whether she was in fun or in earnest, gave her a strong hold over not only his imagination, but his imperious will.

If Maurice had been called upon to give an explanation of his feelings or his plans, he would have been more puzzled even than Georgia: he had not yet reached the stage where he perceived any necessity for serious meditation. He and Phillis persevered in the conduct they had adopted on their introduction; there was a great deal of gay skirmishing,—of quarrelling, for that matter,—because they seldom passed more than eight-and-forty hours without indulging in a battle royal, wherein, whether right or wrong, Phillis invariably gained the victory and forced him to apologize. Half the time he could not decide if she were really angry or only acting; but in either case she managed to make herself more bewitching than any other girl he had ever encountered.

He met her one afternoon, about half a mile from her house, driving obstinate Bones along at a great rate.

"Alone!" he said, in surprise, as she clutched the little

steed, who always looked wickedly on the watch to run away. "What has happened? Where on earth is Georgia? It is as wonderful to see you without her as it would have been to meet one of the Siamese twins without his brother."

"I am driving over to Deacon Foster's," replied Phillis. "As for the other twin, she is busy arraying herself in cloth of gold and diamonds, in order to be ready for the reception of those princes and potentates who are coming."

"Oh! old Featherhead and his wife," cried Maurice, impatiently. "I had forgotten they warned us we might expect a visit to-day."

"A pretty way to mutilate the name of the Governor of the State!" said Phillis French. "Yes; Mr. and Mrs. Featherstone—the Honorable Mr. and Mrs.—are about to grace my humble dwelling by their presence. The bare thought put me in such a flutter that I ran away."

"They're an awful pair of bores," sighed Peyton. "I don't know which is the worst,—the governor or his governess."

"All the same you must go to the house and help your sister to entertain them. Put on your best behavior—such as it is—and show yourself worthy of grand society."

"Oh, there's plenty of time," returned he. "They will not come till late: it isn't three yet. How long shall you be gone?"

"I should say about an hour; but, as I am a conscientious woman, I'll not certify to the precise minute."

"You will be back long before they get to the house. I'll go with you,—I mean," he added, quickly, "will you allow me to have that pleasure?"

"Oh, good gracious!" she exclaimed; "you are beginning to practise your fine manners. I hardly recognize you. What shall I say? honored sir, the pleasure will be on my side,—only, I don't want you."

"Please let me go," he said, stepping into the carriage.

Phillis gave the signal to Bones, who kicked up his heels and started off like a reindeer. For some seconds Phillis neither spoke nor took any notice of Peyton. He glanced furtively at her, and finally asked,—

"Are you vexed? Did you really want me not to go?"

"I'd forgotten you were there," she replied. "Of course *you must come*, if you insist; I can't put you out of the car-

riage." Then they talked pleasantly for a while, but when they had driven nearly two miles, and were not far from Deacon Foster's house, she suddenly said,—

"I told you, did I not, that you would have to walk back?"

"Indeed, no! Why should I?"

"Because I am going to take home a bag of seed-corn, and it will have to occupy the place where you are seated."

"But you can leave that. Joe Grimshaw shall come over for it."

"Thanks! but the bag of seed-corn and I must go home together."

"Now, are you really in earnest?" he asked.

"I am," she said, and her face expressed her sincerity.

"Then I may as well get down here," returned he, a little nettled.

She stopped Bones at once. Maurice jumped out of the wagon, and lifted his hat very ceremoniously.

"Permit me to thank you for your consideration," said he.

"Well, it was lucky I remembered it before we got quite to the house," she replied. "A pleasant walk to you; and, Mr. Peyton—" raising her voice, for he had walked away.

"Miss French?"

"The next time I tell you not to do a thing, please remember that I mean what I say."

"Thanks; I will," he answered.

Phillis drove on. The last sound he heard, as the wagon disappeared round a turn in the road, was a burst of laughter. He could not help laughing himself, vexed as he felt. He sat down on a green bank by the roadside, lighted a cigar, and concluded that he might as well wait a little before setting out on his walk. He fell to musing over Phillis French and her faculty for being delightfully exasperating, and, as was usually the case when thinking about her, he grew so absorbed that a considerable time passed without his knowing it. The noise of wheels roused him from his reverie: she had come back. It was vexatious to be found there, but too late to scale the fence and conceal himself behind the bushes, for the carriage had turned the angle in the road. On dashed Bones, and, to increase Peyton's vexation, he saw that the seat by Phillis was

empty: she had not brought the bag of corn; her assertion of the necessity for so doing had been a mere pretence to tease and punish him.

"Why, how do you do?" she cried, stopping the pony with some difficulty, and speaking in a tone of surprise, as if she had not seen him for several days and would never have dreamed of encountering him in that spot. "Been having a walk? If you feel inclined for a drive, I shall be delighted."

They got on charmingly again. She began asking questions about Italy, and made him describe, as he could do when he liked, places and people in a delightful way. They reached the road which led up the hill towards Bourke's house. Phillis guided the pony into it.

"Where are you going?" Peyton asked.

"To take you home."

"But I don't want to go there."

"I shall be easier in my mind if I leave you safe in your own abode," she persisted: "you are too young and beautiful to be left straying about on the highway."

"But I shall have to walk all the way back—"

"The exercise will be good for you."

"Or run, rather," he added, glancing at his watch; "and then I shall barely be in time."

"In time?" she repeated.

"I suppose you have not forgotten that the Featherstones are coming?" he exclaimed. "Now please be good, and drive to your house."

"Not for worlds!" she cried, with a shiver and a look of fright. "I'm so glad you reminded me. I wouldn't arrive till those grandees have departed for anything. The bare fact of knowing they have been there will upset my nerves for a week: to encounter them would scare me to death."

She gave Bones a little taste of the whip, and he flew on like a mad creature towards the hill. It would have been difficult to jump out, even if Maurice had felt inclined.

"Well, by Jove," he exclaimed, laughing in spite of himself, "you certainly are the most provoking girl I ever met in my life."

She dropped the reins. Bones seized the bit in his mouth and immediately ran away.

"Do you want to break your neck?" demanded Peyton,

snatching the reins, and compelling Bones, after a struggle, to moderate his pace. "Now, pray, why was that done?"

"Because I did not choose to drive you home," said she.

"Then I will you," he answered, and turned the pony's head in the opposite direction.

There was a brief silence. Phillis broke it by asking in an amiable tone, as if there had been no pause in their conversation about Italy,—

"So you stopped a month once at Ischia? It has always been one of my favorite dream-haunts. I've an old book full of such lovely engravings of the island."

Maurice was beguiled into fresh descriptions, which lasted till they reached the lane that led to Phillis French's barn. Very often they drove in that way, and walked through the garden to the house, for Phillis always hated to have her gravelled road cut up. Bones dashed up the lane.

"I suppose it makes no difference," Maurice said, as the pony came to a halt before the open barn doors.

At the same instant Joe Grimshaw came running towards them.

"Oh, Mr. Peyton, I've been a-hunting you everywhere!" he cried. "The Gov'ner's over to Miss French's, and his wife too, as fine as a fiddle, and they can't stop; and Miss Georgia she's in a terrible taking 'cause you couldn't be found."

Maurice sprang out of the wagon, saying,—

"Now then, Miss French, we must bestir ourselves. Be good enough to show how agile you can be, for I mustn't wait."

"Go to the house, Joe, and say Mr. Peyton is coming," said Phillis.

"Don't you want me to unharness the pony?" he asked.

"Do as I tell you," said Phillis.

Away went Joe. Peyton looked at Phillis; she quite glared at him in return.

"Will you get out?" he inquired, perhaps a little imperatively in his haste, feeling that her jesting was ill-timed.

"When you can ask me politely—"

"I hope I did so."

"And when you have begged my pardon," she added.

"That I certainly have no necessity for doing," cried he, a little hotly, for her face and voice were angry.

"Then I shall stop where I am," said she, and at the mo-

ment Bones, tired of waiting, trotted in-doors before Maurice could catch the bridle.

The pony stopped in the middle of the barn, and began peacefully nibbling at a bundle of hay which lay on the floor. Maurice paused an instant, and then followed. Phillis sat leaning back in the carriage, pensively regarding the rafters which supported the roof.

"Miss French, *will* you get out?" pleaded Peyton. "What will these people think of me?"

"At present, what I think is the important thing," she replied, without looking at him; "and I think you very rude."

"I assure you I didn't mean to be."

"Then beg my pardon."

"No; that would be owning I had done or said something wrong intentionally, and I have not," he said, beginning to wax obstinate.

"I shall stay here till you do," returned she.

"Ah! now do get out," he urged.

"You can go to your friends."

"Of course I can't leave you sitting here alone."

"Oh, I have a newspaper. I can amuse myself," she replied, and drew a journal from under the cushion of the seat, unfolded it, and began to read.

"Good heavens, Miss French, you don't mean to sit there?" cried he, half laughing and wholly vexed.

"I see the harvests have been generally very good," said she, in an interested tone, without lifting her eyes.

"Miss French!"

"Oh, dear me! Victoria Woodhull has been making another speech. I must read that."

"My dear Miss French, I do beg—only think what a position you are placing me in."

"I suppose you mean what a position you have placed yourself in, if you mean anything," she answered, coldly, her eyes still on the paper.

"Now, do you really want those visitors to think me a savage?" he asked.

"I have already told you that their opinion does not concern me. I think you a savage—and worse; that is enough."

"It is rather too much, and very undeserved," cried he. "*Miss French*, you really must be good enough to descend."

"When you have begged my pardon."

"I vow I never will do it!" he exclaimed, so vexed by her persistency, and by her uncalled-for anger,—for now he really believed her angry,—that he could not control himself. "Never!"

"Then I never will get out," said she. "I vow that too."

Again he had to laugh, irritated as he was.

"It is too bad!" he cried.

"Much too bad!" retorted she. "It would be better if you had the grace to feel ashamed, instead of laughing. I assure you, Mr. Peyton, you will find it no laughing-matter."

"Why, merciful heavens! I have no more idea why you are angry, Miss French, than I have what is going on in the moon," cried he.

"The paper says it will change to-morrow," said she, glancing at the sheet again. "I mean the moon, not your paucity of ideas."

"Come! We will compromise; if you will get out, I will beg your pardon after,—though I don't know what for."

"Hum! hum! Lehigh Railway stocks are looking up," murmured Phillis, turning the journal inside out.

"Did you hear me, Miss French?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, I heard you," she answered.

"Well, do you agree?"

"No!"

Then she was deep in another paragraph, which apparently possessed a great interest for her. And now Joe Grimshaw's voice sounded from the distance, calling, in agonized tones,—

"Mr. Peyton—*oh*, Mr. Peyton! The Gov'nor's got to go, for he's promised to meet a deputation at half-past four, and he's only just time to get to Wachuset."

"Miss French, you hear?"

"I hear!"

"Will you—"

"Beg my pardon."

"If I do, it will be—"

"Without reservation, Mr. Peyton,—without adding to your original offence by excuse or argument."

Again Joe Grimshaw shouted.

"Oh, do hurry up, Mr. Peyton!"

"Miss French, I beg your pardon!" cried Maurice, quite

furiously. He extended his hand; she stepped lightly out, smiling and thanking him pleasantly.

"Can't you speak?" she asked.

"You told me I was only to beg your pardon."

"Very well, you have done it, and a great goose you were for your pains," replied she. "Now run fast and make your peace with the Governess."

"But why were you angry?" he asked, looking back over his shoulder.

"I wasn't; but, since you chose to think me so, I kept up the pretence. Tell Joe Grimshaw to come and take Bones—oh, here he is! Go, go, Mr. Peyton."

Away Maurice dashed, caught the departing guests, and excused himself as best he might. The old Governor had been too busy admiring Georgia to notice her brother's absence; but the Governess, as the young people styled her, was far from being content. She afterwards spoke of Maurice as a young man who had been greatly injured by wealth and adulation, and hinted fears that he would sooner or later reach a bad end,—if not in this world, certainly in the next; and, though she expressed her grief that the nephew of her valued friend Mrs. Conyngham should be reserved for a fate so dismal, she stated her dread with an air of cheerful satisfaction which somewhat belied her assertions.

Maurice tried to appear a little stately towards Phillis when he and Bourke came to the house in the evening, but she coaxed him in the most delightful way, walked up and down the porch leaning on his arm, and suddenly, when he was thoroughly brought round by her efforts, and even almost reduced to the verge of sentiment by her airs of contrition which set so prettily on her, she told Georgia and Mr. Bourke the story of the drive, and described Peyton's words and manner in a fashion so droll that the two laughed till they cried, and Maurice himself had to laugh as heartily.

CHAPTER XIV.

MISS GROSVENOR'S surprise—long since forgotten—when she discovered that her first month of summer quiet had passed, was more than equalled by the astonishment her brother felt when, on reckoning up the weeks, he found that four weeks had elapsed since the date of his arrival.

The growth of his liking for Denis Bourke into a warm intimacy would have appeared natural and fitting to anybody who knew them both, though whether the relations which had grown up between Phillis Freuch and himself would have seemed fitting to a stern judge,—say, Aunt Conyngham, for instance,—whatever the opinion in regard to its naturalness, was open to doubt.

A desperate flirtation would probably have been the name given by that lady, or by any other severe critic, to the intercourse between the pair. Assuredly there had been no downright love-making on Maurice's part, though, had he reflected, conscience would have forced him to admit that his attentions, and often his language, would have made many girls believe that at length such consummation must arrive.

But Phillis received his gallantries with perfect composure, laughed at his pretty speeches, and often irritated him sorely by her insensibility. From the first, he had told himself that for once he did not mean to flirt; it would be ungenerous, considering the position in which she stood; then, too, Georgia had warned him to be cautious, because she could not and would not permit so much as a passing shadow to disturb her friend's quiet.

Still, it was exasperating to have produced no impression, to see her as indifferent to his flatteries as if he were her brother. Indeed, in all ways she kept him in a state of such constant excitement that these weeks had proved as full of enjoyment as any he had ever spent, insupportable as he would in advance have pronounced the uneventful life he was leading.

But there were no unpleasant mentors near to utter comments, and *Georgia and Bourke* had so fully decided that the

couple were heart-whole, and likely to remain so, that they ceased to bestow any thought upon the matter. Nor did Maurice trouble himself to think ; he accepted the condition of things as the pleasantest experience which had ever crossed his path, and put by reflection as completely as his sister had at one time, possessing the advantage of her in this respect,—there was no disquieting subject to start up now and then and remind him that sooner or later it must be faced and an important decision reached.

It was no fault of their relative that the brother and sister remained so culpably negligent. Aunt Conyngham wrote often enough, and expatiated amply enough upon duty, according to her reading thereof, to keep that inexorable Moloch constantly before their eyes. She would certainly long since have come in search of Georgia and carried her off, had not Maurice been there to aid the young lady in her written pleas and reasons for prolonging her sojourn. Peyton unscrupulously embroidered the opinion of a physician spending the summer at Wachuset into a positive injunction, on the part of the well-known and weighty medical authority, that she must tarry into the autumn if she wished to return to town with her health fully established.

This was an argument which even Aunt Conyngham could not resist, especially as it was vigorously supported by Mr. Caruthers, who had been more alarmed by Georgia's illness and subsequent delicacy than the gravity of the case really warranted. Besides this consideration, he still held firm to his belief that her present seclusion would prove favorable to his hopes. Her absence had taught him that his sentiments went far beyond the ground of esteem upon which he had based them in the outset ; and, though not a vain man, Mr. Caruthers possessed sufficient of our sex's fatuity to believe, when he found how his own feelings had warmed and deepened, that once his wife, he should be able to develop Georgia's into a corresponding depth and warmth,—teach her to love him, in short.

Since man became a civilized being, that theory of teaching a woman to love has been a creed so fixed in the masculine mind that even the earthquakes overtaking countless ill-fated marriages founded on such perilous soil have proved powerless to shake it ; and, unless women learn to recognize the

danger, the duller portion of humanity will cling to and act in accordance therewith until the end of time.

September had come, but there were few signs of autumn visible; and, as in that blessed altitude the nights and mornings had continued cool during the entire summer, there could be no reason for regret that the monarch showed slight disposition to abdicate in favor of his successor.

Denis Bourke owned a good saddle-horse; Peyton had hired three other steeds for equestrian duty, and provided an additional pair of stout cobs, which took a big roomy barouche up and down the mountain-roads in capital style. So there were numerous riding and driving expeditions, long walks, picnics, at which the brother and sister met agreeable people, well mannered, well dressed, and were often secretly astonished to find that the most interesting of the ladies was perhaps a country school-mistress, the best cultivated young man acting as a book-keeper, or filling any position that would enable him to earn money enough to resume his winter's collegiate course, from standing behind a counter to taking photographs.

It was not until later, and then only by accident, that they learned how often Phillis French and Denis Bourke had risen at unholy hours and done work enough for a whole day, long before their respective guests had awakened, in order to enjoy their diversion with easy consciences, certain that everything in-doors and out had been left in such order and forwardness that their subordinates could make no blunders, or even hope, in case so inclined, that any shirking or shortcoming would escape the vigilant eyes of their employers. But both had now increased leisure, and to the whole group each day seemed more delightful than its predecessor.

Birds were as plentiful as old Patrick had prophesied, and Peyton thought that in all his experience of Scotch moors, he had never enjoyed shooting-excursions so much as those in which Georgia and Phillis usually met them at luncheon-time with amply-provided baskets, as gleefully carried by Joe Grimshaw as if they had been thistledown, instead of a goodly weight of marvellous pastries, cunningly-devised meats, and carefully-concocted beverages, peculiar to the land which has a genius in that line.

A proud and happy youth was Joe in those days, and, though these thoughtless young people spoiled him sadly, he

was too genuinely proud and honorable to commit the error of growing careless or presumptuous. He adored the whole party, but Miss French and Peyton were the special objects of his admiration. His delight in their merry war of wits was inexpressible. Sometimes, in order to vent it, he used to rush behind a tree, or any other shelter convenient, and stand on his head, wildly waving his legs in the air, and shrieking in ecstasy, till he brought the four to learn what had happened. He tried occasionally to repeat their sayings to his mother, who was as happy as Joe in the good luck which had befallen him; but, though he amused her extremely by his narrations, he was never himself satisfied with his reproduction, and invariably wound up by saying,—

“’Tain’t no use; they’re that tonguey that a play-actor couldn’t touch ’em off. Mr. Peyton he’s just like a streak o’ lightning; and Miss Phillis she’s more so,—she’s a streak o’ greased lightning; and you might plate a fellow as thick with non-conductors as your work-basket is with willar twigs, she’d scorch him every time.”

In spite of the confidence which existed between Bourke and his guest, when they were alone they talked of any other subject rather than the two young ladies who at this juncture formed so important an element in their lives. To a looker-on this reticence might have appeared suspicious, but it never so struck the men themselves.

It is a very odd thing, but none the less true, that, except a man has a sister whom he is anxious to see married, the fact that any acquaintance is likely to fall in love with her seldom enters his mind. In the present instance, if Maurice had thought, he would have dismissed the idea with the simple reflection that Bourke would never be insane enough to dream of the thing; he must know Georgia and her ambitions and tastes too well.

But just at the close of that first September fortnight Maurice had his eyes opened to such an extent that more than he wondered at his friend’s folly did he marvel at his own blindness, quite forgetting that he had been too much occupied with another young woman to think of his sister’s possible adorers.

They were spending a *tête-à-tête* evening at the Den,—an *unusual thing* for them to do; but Miss Grosvenor had over-

fatigued herself by too long a ride, so Phillis decided that she was to go to bed directly after tea, and explicitly informed the young gentlemen that the pleasure of their society would not be desired at the Nest before the afternoon of the following day.

A shower came up about dusk, so the pair were obliged to remain in-doors; but they managed to pass the hours pleasantly enough. They read a little, Denis played on his violin, and they talked an immensity, though less about horses and women than female novelists seem to think must inevitably be the case when a couple of men are doomed to a *tête-à-tête*.

They did reach the latter topic at length, apropos to a remark Peyton made concerning a romance he was reading by snatches in the intervals of conversation.

"The plot is clumsily managed, and the leading idea absurd," he said, flinging down the volume. "How could you tell me it was worth wading through, Denis?"

"Because I thought so. The heroine is rather weak and shallow, but the hero is a fine fellow."

"I don't agree with you; and I think the young woman showed her one gleam of good sense in marrying the rival," returned Maurice. "At least, he had something substantial to offer in the way of settlements, and your hero had only his fine theories, and would have half starved her in order to carry them out."

A very warm, though perfectly good-natured, discussion ensued, and Maurice finally said, with great emphasis,—

"I know any fellow with a sister would feel inclined to break her neck if she acted otherwise than that girl did."

Nothing could be further from his thoughts than his own sister and the possibility of Bourke's accepting a personal application of the speech; though had he known anything about his friend's state of mind he would have seen that he could not fail to do so.

Denis only replied by a somewhat constrained laugh, and Peyton, deeming the subject at an end, lapsed into a vague reverie far removed therefrom,—a reverie roused by the sight of Phillis French's name on the fly-leaf of the book. They both smoked for a while in silence; then Bourke said quietly, though with a faint quiver in his voice,—

"I suppose I am to consider that a warning. I had better

not make a fool of myself over your sister. It is quite true. I knew it before."

"My sister!" exclaimed Peyton, coming out of his reflections with a start, and staring at his companion in astonishment. "I'm blest if I have the least idea what you mean!"

His surprise was so genuine that Denis perceived the utter gratuitousness of the confession his speech had held.

"I am sure I don't know what you meant, unless that was it," he said, coloring hotly. "We seem to have been talking at cross-purposes."

"Well," returned Maurice, unable to resist a laugh, "you have spoken plainly enough, so that we needn't do so any longer, at all events."

"I am always making an ass of myself!" cried Denis, disconsolately.

"I doubt whether a woman, who heard you say that in reference to your being a little smitten with her, would consider the remark a compliment," said Maurice.

"Oh, hang it! you know what I mean! don't chaff!" retorted Bourke, rather impatiently. Then he began to laugh also, and added, "But there's no use my turning rusty with you because I have blundered out my little secret."

Peyton regarded him gravely enough now, and said, after a moment's hesitation,—

"Why, Denis, old man, do you mean to tell me you are really in earnest?"

"I didn't mean to tell you anything, but I have. However, it makes no difference. You will keep it to yourself, and I don't mind your knowing."

"You are positively sweet on Georgia?"

"That seems to me what is the matter," replied Bourke, dryly. "Confound it, do stop looking so astonished!"

"I believe a fellow always is astonished when it is his own sister that another fellow likes," said Maurice, trying to hide his sudden dismay at the thought of what pain his friend might have to suffer if he indeed loved Georgia.

"And I suppose in this special instance you think it tolerably presumptuous on the other fellow's part," rejoined Denis.

"Don't talk rubbish!" cried Maurice. "No matter who *the woman was*, there could be no presumption for a man in *your position*—"

"My position is that of a Pennsylvania farmer," interrupted Bourke. "We won't have any mistakes about that part of the business."

Maurice remained silent for a moment; then he said,—

"I want to ask you one question. You have had an opportunity during these last months to become better acquainted with the lady than you could have done in years of meeting out in the world?"

"Yes; well?" questioned Bourke, for Maurice had paused.

"You understand that I am speaking just as I should if she were no relation of mine; so you will not be vexed?"

"Of course not. Drive on."

"Should you say, then, from your knowledge of her character, that the young woman would be likely to accept the situation as you put it?"

"I should say nothing could be more unlikely," Bourke replied, with composure. "All the same, if she were genuinely fond of a man she has pluck enough to do so."

"An ambitious girl, brought up with the most extravagant habits, accustomed to change, living on excitement?"

"Just so!"

"And you actually propose to ask her to give up these things, which have been the end and aim of her life?"

"Halt again. I don't think I propose to ask her anything. I only stumbled into telling you about myself and my own feelings."

"I believe she fancies you are soft on her pretty friend," said Peyton.

"She did at one time; I doubt if she does now," returned Denis. "And, what is more, she thought it a great shame there should be any possibility of her pretty friend's falling a victim to such a heavy, awkward lout."

"Oh, nonsense!—a man born and bred a gentleman."

"Ah, but she only considered me a half-educated farmer, born to the position she found me in, and she stuck to that idea as long as she could. You need not exclaim; I saw how she felt; it was natural enough, too."

Maurice rose, and began to walk slowly up and down the room, not knowing what to say, and feeling each instant more disturbed on his companion's account. Bourke pulled a *sheet of paper towards him*, commenced drawing mouths and

noses, and soon fell to work upon a female head, which gradually resolved itself into a very fair likeness of Georgia Grosvenor.

At length Maurice paused in front of the table, and said,—
“Since we have begun to talk freely, we may as well go on.”

Denis nodded, laid his pipe aside, and whistled softly while continuing his work.

“It’s deuced awkward, after all,” exclaimed Peyton, resuming his promenade. “However, I was to put the fact of my relationship to her out of the question.”

“Exactly; and, that accomplished, what do you want to say to me?” Bourke asked.

“Why, if you like her enough,—if you want to ask her to marry you,—then I should consider it reasonable to explain how matters really stand on the other side of the water, and tell her what the future must bring.”

“I don’t propose to be reasonable,” said Denis, suspending his pencil, and regarding his sketch with a critical air.

“It would be odd, if you did!” retorted Maurice, half compassionate, half vexed. “You are an absurd sort of Don Quixote, you know. A fellow who gives up his shekels just from a romantic whim—”

“Stow that, else you’ll make me wish I’d allowed you to believe as you did at first, that I had dropped the money on the turf. You promised never to breathe a word; remember that!”

“Of course I sha’n’t tell her. But I confess I don’t see what you propose to yourself.”

“I propose to live here, do my work, and make myself as useful and as contented as I can,” replied Bourke.

“But, my dear fellow, you could not expect a girl brought up in what we call society, to consent to bury herself alive with you in this blessed old farm?”

“How if I were a large landed proprietor,—doing on a big scale what I am on a little one?”

“That would be different.”

“Not a bit! If a woman could take no interest in my plans on their present basis, she could not simply because the sphere was enlarged, and the consequence would be great unhappiness to me.”

"Well, Denis, my advice is to put Georgia Grosvenor out of your head. There! that is frank enough, or the devil is in it. And you understand, dear old boy, I only say this because I like you better than any other man I know. All the same I regard you as a kind of lunatic: I reserve that right."

"I can't put her out of my head, or my heart either," Denis answered, slowly, pushing the paper aside, and leaning back in his chair, with his hands clasped behind his neck. "Nothing could be more improbable than that Miss Grosvenor has ever dreamed of caring a rush about me. It is still more absurdly and outrageously improbable that she should ever reach a point where she would care enough to feel that accepting a share in my life was not a sacrifice too great ever to contemplate."

"And in that case?"

"Why, that ends the matter. If I were a Croesus, my plans would not be changed,—simply enlarged."

"Oh, bother your general brotherhood, and fighting for impossible millennium ideas!" cried Peyton, in a tone half irritated, half admiring. "It's all rubbish, you know; though when you get the steam on, you make one half forget the fact."

"They are ideas I am not likely to relinquish, Maurice; and, even if I marry, my wife must be certain in advance that she cannot only sympathize but help."

"My dear boy, you will have to wait for some young woman of the future,—say three or four hundred years or so."

"I don't know that. Now, there's Miss Grosvenor—if she really loved a man."

"A good girl,—a splendid girl,—but too clever to let her heart run away with her head. You have heard her admit frankly, over and over, how worldly she is."

"I have heard; but I think she is very tired of the life in which she has been brought up."

"Oh, everybody talks that stuff about the emptiness of the world; but the aspect of affairs would change if it came to giving up position and luxury, and I am acquainted with no woman who requires more of both than the young lady in question."

"Yet how thoroughly she enjoys her stay here!"

"Because it is a new experience. Tell her she had to stop,

and she would go out of her senses in a week. Come, now, how much do you suppose she spends a year on her dress?"

"I've very little idea of such things. She has wonderful taste, but simple, I should say. She is almost always in white, with bits of lace and what—you—call it—embroidery."

"Each bit of which costs, God knows what! It must all be of the finest quality, and everything in the same style."

"Oh!" ejaculated Denis. "Now I understand why P. French laughed when I spoke of Miss Grosvenor's extreme simplicity."

"Miss Grosvenor has four thousand a year,—dollars you understand, not pounds,—and it takes two-thirds of the amount to pay her dressmaker's bills, Don Quixote!"

"Oh!" Denis once more ejaculated; then he began again to whistle softly, contemplating his sketch as he did so.

"Miss Grosvenor," pursued Maurice, "has been brought up to marry a millionaire: she has a fad about liking him, which has caused her hitherto to throw away chances in a rather reckless fashion; but she will undoubtedly do the thing at last."

"Find some millionaire she likes?" asked Denis, calmly, as he wrote a few lines under the portrait, only to efface them directly after.

"Marry one, at all events."

"She certainly ought to do so, if she means to remain faithful to her creeds," said Denis, and while speaking he pushed the sketch under a large book that lay on the table.

Maurice said to himself,—

"He can't be very deeply hit, else he could not be so confidently cool about it. I suppose Georgia has talked blank verse until he really tried to persuade himself that she was his ideal woman, able to devote her life to the helping on of his apocryphal millennium. Fancy Georgia at that work! But she must not risk hurting him too much; he's the best fellow in the world, and I shall give my lady a little hint. She has a conscience, I will say for her,—an unusual thing for the creature called a fine lady to possess; but she has one."

Presently the clock struck.

"Midnight!" Bourke exclaimed. "Pretty hours for the country!—for a working man especially! Politeness aside, *I am going to bed*. I suppose it would have been just as

well, Maurice, for me not to have blundered into this talk; still, I am not sorry."

"If I could have liked you better than I did before, I think this would have made me; that's all I can say," replied Peyton.

"Quite enough, old man! Luckily, there will be no occasion for you to expostulate with the lady. She is not likely to run the risk of committing any folly where I am concerned."

"Whatever she did, I should hold my tongue," said Maurice.

"Good Lord! Imagine—only human imagination can't go so far—that she learned to care enough for me to give up her life, as worldly people understand the word, for my sweet sake: wouldn't you take out a commission of lunacy at once?"

"Oh, no! I might tell her that I could not decide whether she was doing herself or you the greater injustice, but I should say no more: indeed, she would not allow me."

"Fortunately, you will not be tried," returned Denis, with a little laugh. "All this talk is a pure waste of fancy."

"Now, there is money," continued Peyton: "if I wanted to give her ever so much, she would not have it. True, a fellow never has a superabundance, even with a rent-roll that goes as far as mine into the thousands; but I am not quite a pig. I'd have liked when I reached my majority to increase her income."

"What the deuce are you talking about this sort of thing for?" Denis broke in, rather roughly.

"Just to show you how peculiar Georgia is," Maurice answered, quietly. "Give her a lump outright I could not, according to the terms of my father's will. It seems he was jealous of the idea of my pretty little mother's marrying again. I believe her second husband had loved her when she was a girl, and he stated distinctly that if she did, not a penny was to be hers after I grew up, except what I chose to give her, and he expressly forbade my giving anything to her children, if she had any. Georgia heard about all those unjust conditions from the aunt; I think she would starve sooner than touch a farthing that had ever belonged to him."

"Quite right!" exclaimed Bourke, with suddenly flashing eyes, *while a smile softened his mouth.*

"However, one day or another she will marry so well that she will not need it," pursued Peyton.

"No doubt," said Denis: "we have already agreed upon that point."

"Hitherto, she has had no necessity for thinking,—she has enough to be independent of the aunt, who, by the way, only possesses a life-interest in her husband's estate,—and she's had the bringing up of a young princess."

While he spoke, Bourke had been lighting the candles.

"I must close the shutters," he said, abruptly: "I remember we sent Patrick to bed hours ago."

They went up-stairs together; and, as they paused to say good-night, Maurice grasped his friend's hand and shook it warmly.

"You are the best fellow in the world!" cried he. "I wish—I wish you had millions, and were not Don Quixote."

"Thanks," said Bourke, laughing. "Sleep well. I mean to, for I am awfully tired."

CHAPTER XV.

THE next morning Georgia and Maurice walked over to the post-office, as they often did, by way of having an object in their stroll.

Georgia sat down on a bench under the shade of a walnut-tree, and waited, while her brother entered the house to struggle with the very deaf and very obstinate old lady, who always appeared as unwilling to give people their correspondence as if called upon to part with some valuable personal possession. He returned victorious after a time, and said, as he handed his sister her portion of the booty,—

"I see you have a letter from Caruthers."

"Have I? Oh, yes; this is his writing," Georgia replied, carelessly, and put her epistles in her pocket. But her indifference was assumed: the well-known character on one special envelope had caught her eye before Maurice spoke, and the sight had not been pleasant to her, rousing reflections all the more annoying because so rude a contrast to the sunny mood

she had been in for days. She remembered that her admirer's last letter still remained unanswered, though an unconscionable time had elapsed since its reception. She had deferred her reply for the express purpose of bestowing serious meditation upon him and his wishes, yet, it seemed to her now that she had scarcely thought of either during the interval, but had just drifted on in her old fashion, forgetting that she must soon go back to the realities of life,—Mr. Caruthers included.

"You don't seem in any hurry to find out what he has to say," Maurice observed, playfully, though the under-current of his thoughts was grave enough, having the previous night's conversation with Bourke as an object.

"We must go," said Georgia, rising: "you vowed you had only an hour to waste on me, and it is nearly up."

Maurice walked beside her in silence, determined to take advantage of this opportunity of giving his sister a hint that, if she was not careful, she might risk seriously hurting his friend. But it was difficult to decide how to speak: the slightest betrayal of Bourke's secret would be dishonorable, and any caution, unless very skilfully worded, would offend Georgia deeply.

"Has Caruthers ever proposed coming here?" he asked, suddenly.

"Good gracious, no!" she answered, quite startled—she could not have told why—by the bare suggestion. Then she felt that her tone and exclamation were less complimentary to her suitor than they ought to have been, and might inspire Maurice with erroneous ideas in regard to her sentiments; so she added, laughingly, "He might be goosey,—no, he is too dignified,—but they might all wonder, you know."

"I don't see what they could have to do with the matter. Anyhow, whom do you mean by 'they'?—Miss French and Denis Bourke?" demanded Maurice, glancing down at her more searchingly than she liked.

"Don't be impertinent!" she cried, gayly, yet conscious that her color heightened. "Of course I meant Phil: she would persecute me day and night."

Again Maurice relapsed into silence, meditating in what form he could best frame his counsel. Georgia had indulged a momentary vague sensation of uneasiness lest he should

make further mention of Bourke; yet, when he did not, she feared that his dropping the subject looked suspicious. Then her conscience asked why it should, and was hastily informed that of course there could be no reason; she and her conscience knew very well that Miss Grosvenor was always absurd! All the same she could not resist saying, even while she recognized the imprudence of the speech,—

“Naturally, though I might confide my perplexities to Phillis,—for I love her dearly,—I should scarcely feel it necessary to make a confidant of any young man I happen to be brought in contact with.”

“Didn’t Solomon say there was wisdom in having a multitude of counsellors?” Maurice asked, gayly. “After all, is it quite fair for a girl charming enough to be dangerous, to go about letting the masculine portion of humanity believe her entirely unfettered, when there’s a particular man hidden in the background? Of course I am only speaking on general principles, you understand.”

“Of course,—since it could not apply to me,” returned Georgia. “I am entirely unfettered. I wrote you about the terms on which I stand towards Mr. Caruthers: at least he fully comprehends. I hope and pray you are not going to fret me by taking up Aunt Conyngham’s ridiculous theories.”

She began speaking calmly enough, but before she finished her voice grew hurried and vexed.

“I don’t mean to have theories,” Maurice answered. “You must judge for yourself, my dear girl.”

“You are a good boy!” cried Georgia. “Ah, there is Phillis coming to meet us,” she added, in a tone of unconscious relief.

Maurice left the two girls at the gate of the Nest, for he had promised to join Bourke at eleven and go with him into the wood, where there were some trees to be marked for felling.

He wondered, as he walked on towards the place of rendezvous, if it could come within the range of possibility that Georgia during these past months had allowed any romantic vision to approach her, as might easily have been the case with an ordinary girl. It seemed incredible, according to his opinion of her character: attached as he was to his sister, he did not give her credit for great tenderness, or believe love the

necessity with her which it is to most women. But, even if she had indulged in some faint gleams of a poetic idyl, he could feel confident that she would not allow it to interfere with her future: it would never attain coloring and force sufficient to affect her judgment or ambition. Her head was so much stronger than her heart that, even supposing a case (difficult for him to do) in which a struggle might arise between the two, the latter would undoubtedly be sacrificed.

In the whole round of his experience he had never met a woman so thoroughly worldly as his aunt, and Georgia had proved so apt a pupil that he considered her now very nearly the equal of her instructress. The idea of Georgia Grosvenor's relinquishing luxury, position, adulation, for any man's sake, appeared positively absurd. He was sorry for poor old Denis, but then Denis must perceive too clearly the madness of his dream to let it sink deep enough to hurt very long. As for Georgia, if she had dreamed a little, she would wake now, and cast her vision aside with no more thought than she might bestow upon one that visited her in sleep. But he did her the justice to feel assured that she would take his warning and put an end to any chance of Denis's endangering further his own peace of mind: indeed, Maurice did not doubt that before many days went by, Bourke would be enlightened in regard to Herbert Caruthers.

In the afternoon, Georgia found herself left to her own devices, for Phillis had driven with her grandmother to visit a friend who lived some miles off, and would not return till towards evening.

Georgia had read her letters, beginning with that from Mr. Caruthers, ending with her aunt's, and taking a couple of missives from young lady friends between the two, but none of them had pleased her. Each in its way had been a little picture of the great world outside, and that world looked as flat and monotonous to Georgia as the Desert of Sahara, though she did not fail to ascribe this to the fault of her capricious, absurd temperament.

She grew too restless to read or write, so she set out for a ramble, passing through the wood in the direction of the pond, and walking as rapidly as if she had some important engagement and feared she might arrive too late. She was trying to outwalk her troublesome fancies,—all the more troublesome

because they were vague, resolving themselves into a general feeling of dissatisfaction with existence, and a wonder as to what could be found that would make it worth possessing. But her dreary thoughts kept pace with her, and at last she and they sat down together, on a mossy log by the water's edge, and for a long while she yielded herself a passive prey to their persecutions.

The morning had been bright, but the weather had changed as completely as Georgia's mood. The sky had grown gray and overcast; the breeze which surged up from the wood sounded as melancholy in her ear as if it had been the voice of some counsellor, animated by the spirit which inspired Job's friends, anxious to impress upon her the fact that all sublunary aims or wishes are "vanity and vexation of spirit."

Suddenly large drops of rain pattered down into the water and roused Georgia to a realization of present emergencies. She looked up at the clouds and perceived that a shower was imminent,—a heavy one, too. The wood, in spite of its thickness, would not afford sufficient protection: if she ran with all her might she could reach the shelter of Denis Bourke's house in time to escape getting completely drenched.

Away she rushed up the steep path, turning the zigzags at a rate which might have made her dizzy had she not had the fear of the wetting before her eyes. The great drops had been but the *avant-couriers* of the storm: the clouds settled together in a black pall which enveloped the heavens; the air grew close and oppressive; the thunder rumbled in the distance, and now and then a vivid flash of lightning illumined the landscape, but no rain fell.

She reached the gate, hurried through the garden, and gained the porch at the rear of the house, just as the storm burst,—beating down with the tropical fury which an American thunder-shower can display.

Georgia stood for a few seconds contemplating the scene; then a gust of wind blew the rain across the veranda, and she retreated towards the angle to where the kitchen was situated, expecting to find Tabitha and old Patrick. The gray cat sat washing his face in Tabitha's arm-chair, but neither the autocrat of the region nor ancient Patrick was visible. Glancing about, Georgia espied a pan of fresh whortleberries on the table, and, as she was thirsty, she ate a quantity of these, then

tried to talk with the cat; he had finished his ablutions, and, being sleepy, refused to converse; he did not even deign to show surprise at this intrusion of a stranger, but just turned his back on her, and addressed himself to slumber, curled up in a heap, with his head resting between his fore-legs.

"You are the most inhospitable monster I ever met," said Georgia, but puss paid no attention to this reproof: so, having eaten all the berries she wanted and duly admired the exquisite tidiness of Mistress Tabitha's domain, she concluded that she might as well explore the regions beyond. She crossed the passage into the dining-room, and, as nothing of interest presented itself there, she went on into the main hall; but just as she had comfortably established herself in an easy-chair, she fancied that the place smelt of tobacco-smoke, and rose in high dudgeon.

Then it occurred to her she would like to look again at the portrait of Mr. Bourke's mother and see if its loveliness struck her as much as it had done when she saw it before. How long ago that time seemed! how her opinion of Denis Bourke had changed! and, as usual when she recalled her blindness and injustice towards him during the early weeks of their acquaintance, she felt a little humiliated and ashamed.

She entered the drawing-room. The shutters of this apartment so sacred in Tabitha's eyes were carefully closed, but Georgia unceremoniously opened them, and also the glass doors which looked out on the back porch. Having come in expressly to study the picture, of course she proceeded to stare out at the sky and wonder if it never meant to clear, to examine the books and newspapers on the tables,—in short, to do anything and everything except fulfil her original intention, behaving as human nature always does when compelled to wait.

At length, as she was pacing up and down, the portrait caught her eye. She stood for some time regarding the beautiful face with a melancholy intentness which grew rather out of her own mood than out of any special sadness in the painted lineaments. She recollected what Phillis had said about the resemblance to her: she went to the mirror which hung over the mantel and contemplated her own image for a few moments, with an evident dissatisfaction whereat any spectator would certainly have marvelled. Then she glanced

towards the picture again, nodded her head, and observed, half aloud,—

"Oh, you have the best of it. There is no doubt of that; and yet I am as handsome as you. I know what makes the difference. You were tender and true, down to the very core of your heart, and I—I'm only Georgia Grosvenor, and Georgia is what the men call, in their horrid slang, a fraud! Yes, you are," she continued, glancing again at her own reflection. "You are worldly and selfish away down to the bottom! You have a perception of beauty and truth, but you are too contemptible even to try to live up to it." She remained silent for a moment, then exclaimed, as if answering some second person, who had heaped these reproaches on her head, "After all, there's a great deal in me that is nice, if only it could get to the surface." She burst out laughing, and, before her merriment ended, felt that she should like to cry, and ejaculated, "I never knew so ridiculous a creature in the whole course of my life! But it isn't Georgia; it's the storm; thunder always affects me in the oddest fashion!"

She returned to the porch to consult the weather, but a fresh gust of wind drove in a torrent of rain which forced her to retreat. The vivid flashes of lightning blinded her, and the roll of the thunder sounded like a tremendous cannonading. She grew positively nervous, and determined to seek the kitchen again. The cat's companionship would be better than none, even if he refused to notice her, and his supreme indifference to the conflict of the elements might shame her nerves into composure.

But she stepped back as she reached the door: it was silly enough to feel as she did; any further yielding to her folly would be unpardonable. She sat down by a table, and drew the nearest book towards her: she would oblige herself to read, and endeavor to forget her absurd sensations, since she could not overcome them by force of will.

The volume proved to be a quarto edition of Shelley. She turned the pages until she found "*Alastor*," and began reading the stately measures half aloud. She very soon discovered that she might as well have been perusing Sanscrit; her mind refused to attach any meaning to the lines, or even to make an attempt at doing so. It seemed a positive desecration to approach the great poet in such a vacuous mood; she

closed the book, and rose from her seat; but she had left the volume lying too far over the edge of the table, and some unguarded movement of her arm sent it down upon the floor. As she stooped to pick it up, she saw a sheet of paper which had fallen out from between the leaves. It was the sketch Bourke had made of her on the previous night, and had forgotten to destroy. Tabitha, during her dusting operations of the morning, had noticed it under the copy of Shelley, and placed it inside the tome for safe keeping.

Georgia recognized Bourke's touch, and told herself, rather fretfully, that she wished the gentleman would find some other way of amusing his leisure moments; nothing could be more annoying than to come upon a portrait of one's self in a place where it had no business to be,—taken, too, without leave or license.

Still she stood regarding the sketch. The resemblance was perfect: she could see that. Then came a hasty thought. How closely he must have studied the face to succeed in producing such a likeness! The reflection disturbed her, though she did not seek to discover the reason why it should.

She noticed some lines traced at the bottom of the page; they had been very faintly written, and afterwards partly obliterated, but she could decipher them; she did not want to try, still she found herself doing so:

"It were all one
That I should love a bright, particular star
And think to wed it."

She dropped the paper on the table as suddenly as if it had burned her fingers, then hid it in the book again, and went back to the porch.

The rain was still falling, but less heavily; the lightning had ceased; at intervals the echo of thunder boomed faintly from the distance, giving tokens of the direction in which the storm had rushed away.

Hardly ever in her life had Georgia felt more troubled and conscience-stricken than at this moment. What had she been about during all these weeks? She had begun with the vaguely-formed intention of proving to Phillis that it would be a waste of her youth, her beauty, her mental gifts, to allow herself to care for her neighbor. This opinion Georgia had

been forced to relinquish; then she had wanted to rouse Bourke out of what she termed the inexplicable apathy which could enable him to rest content with his present existence.

But all these ideas and wishes appeared now to belong to a period so remote! What had she been about during these succeeding weeks which had fled so swiftly, and yet seemed so long to recall, positively not weeks, but years? Why, floating passively along, actually not thinking, except when Mr. Caruthers obtruded himself through his letters and forced her to remember that this present episode had no more part in her real life than some idyllic romance of a poet's brain!

And now, as Mr. Caruthers gained a place in her revery, she felt for the instant that she would be glad never to set eyes on him again. But it did not matter about her and her absurd feelings; indeed, they did not go deep enough even to deserve that appellation, her fancies and caprices. The question of importance was, Had she done harm? Could it be possible that Denis Bourke entertained a warmer regard for her than was consonant with his peace of mind, or, worse than that, with Phillis's happiness?

But, as usual, she was exaggerating beyond all bounds of common sense. The sketch proved nothing; the quotation might have been the result of a half-sentimental mood, such as everybody will indulge now and then, possessing no foundation whatever. Yet, even while thinking this, or, to speak correctly, trying to make herself think it, there came up the recollection of her conversation with Maurice. Had he meant to warn her against troubling his friend's quiet? The words he had spoken would assume that significance now in spite of her, turning her fears into a positive certainty which made her grow cold from head to foot.

The rain had ceased; the sun was peeping out. She must go home; she should like to run ten miles without stopping. There was an odd hurry and confusion in her mind, as if something lay hidden there which she feared to contemplate; but this was just another bit of her folly, nothing more. She must go back to the Nest; the path through the wood would be wet, but if she went by the highway she might meet Bourke and Maurice at the turn where the road led down from *the mountain*, and she did not wish to see anybody. Indeed, *no one must* learn that she had visited the dwelling. How

lucky that Tabitha and Patrick were both absent! She closed the shutters, crossed the passages, and left the house by the kitchen door.

She ran all the way home, and when she got there was so drenched that she had to go up to her room and change her clothes. When she had done this a spasm of orderliness seized her, and she worked as hard as if she had been paid for it in arranging her bureau-drawers. She could have hit upon no task more uncalled for, but she persuaded herself of its necessity, found a new place for each separate article, and so upset her belongings that for several days after she could find nothing she wanted.

By the time she had finished and tired herself half to death, she heard Phillis's voice summoning her from the foot of the stairs.

"Don't you ever mean to descend, Georgia? Grandma and I are perishing for our tea! If you have turned into a statue, or lost the use of your limbs, signify your state and I'll come up and restore you to life. I've a wonderful new remedy for Doctor's cough. I shall try it on you to make sure it won't hurt him: every human being must be put to use in this world."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE next few days were such thoroughly uncomfortable ones to Georgia that there were moments when she felt inclined to write to Aunt Conyngham and beg her to insist upon her departure. She did not afford her relative the triumph of thinking her weary of the quiet which she had so often in her letters declared the pleasantest experience of her life, but she did go so far as to suggest to Maurice the possibility of their making a journey in some direction. Maurice at first turned a deaf ear to her proposal, and when she mentioned it a second time expressed disapprobation, and informed her that she was without exception the most restless human being he had ever encountered.

"It is not very long since you told me you could not bear even to think of the time when you must go away," he said,

and now you want to fly off, heaven knows where or for what."

"I had half promised the Fortescues a visit this autumn," Georgia answered, with unusual meekness.

"Ouf! a horrid house! sure to be full of the most tiresome people one knows, taking their town amusements with them into the country," cried Maurice. "You'll not delude me into going, I assure you: this pastoral existence is too pleasant to forsake."

"It is quite wonderful to hear you chant its praises; you will end by buying a crook and turning shepherd, if this state of mind continues," said Georgia, plucking up spirit enough to wax slightly ironical.

"The poetry you wrote about it affected me in advance," he replied, gayly. "Don't be in a hurry to go back to pomps and vanities; this is a capital place for meditation, if I can judge by your new mood. Every day you spend here now will eventually tell powerfully in favor of reason and Herbert Caruthers."

Georgia endeavored to look contemptuous, but she felt that the attempt was a failure, and Maurice proved by his burst of laughter that he held the same opinion.

"These are subjects upon which it is rather bad taste to jest," said she, stiffly.

"Many people think so, I am aware, but that is not my view," returned he. "However, my remark was not intended as a jest."

"I believe you would want me to marry the man if he were positively abhorrent to me, just for the sake of his money. You are as bad as Aunt Conyngham herself!" Georgia exclaimed.

"I beg your pardon, it is you, not I, who have been that elegant lady's pupil. It would never occur to me to want you to marry any man from that motive."

"And you know I am not capable of doing it!"

"I never accused you of being, my dear child. You have told me over and over that it was necessary you should feel esteem and respect for the man you decided to accept,—that he must possess wealth and position: there your demands ended."

"*Nothing* more is requisite," said Georgia, emphatically.

"Very well; Herbert Caruthers certainly fulfils these needs."

"And of course I mean to marry him!" cried Georgia, goaded by Maurice's vexatious coolness and her own conflicting sentiments into an assertion she had had no intention of making.

"Then, of course, it only remains for me to congratulate—"

"Oh, bother!" she broke in. "I mean I don't know whether I mean to or not!"

"Your explanation lacks lucidity, and your English is faulty," said he.

"Oh, if you want to show me that I bore you when I wish to discuss my affairs, I have done."

"You don't wish to discuss them," he answered, "you only wish to quarrel with me. Why, goodness knows, I don't."

"Nor I either," Georgia admitted, penitently. "The truth is, I have been as cross as two sticks (excuse the inelegance) for several days, but I can't imagine what ails me."

"Perhaps you are not well."

"I am tired of making that excuse for my vagaries; and, besides, I have grown as strong as possible since I fell under Phil's care."

"Then don't be ungrateful and want to rush off."

Georgia knew she was getting on unsafe ground, but still she could not induce herself to forsake it.

"Did you ever think we might end by doing mischief here?" demanded she, and felt ready to bite her tongue off as soon as she had uttered the words.

"In what manner, please?"

"I mean you might," cried she, with feminine ingenuity, seeing a way out of her dilemma by making him the person alone in question, and at the same time inflicting a little punishment in revenge for his teasing.

"And how might I accomplish that feat, my dear Minerva?"

"Oh, suppose—suppose—you know you always flirt with every pretty girl you come near; and if, for instance, Mr. Bourke ended by not liking your paying so much attention to Phillis."

"What would he have to do with the matter?"

"I don't know; if he cared for her he might think he had something."

"*But his feelings would not be my concern.*"

"But if she liked him in reality and only wanted to amuse herself, and if they quarrelled—"

Georgia broke down in despair; she had not punished Maurice, and had only succeeded in putting herself in a still more awkward position.

"So your friend and mine have a weakness for each other?" he asked, calm as ever.

"How can I tell? It is natural to suppose so, thrown together as they have been in this dull place."

"I think," said Maurice, "that we can safely leave them to manage their own affairs. Miss French certainly is quite competent."

And now Georgia feared that he was vexed, and might flirt with Phillis: the hope of annoying another man would prove a powerful motive.

"Oh, I'm not afraid of Phil's being dazzled by your fascinations," said she.

"Then, after all, your fears resolve themselves into a care for Denis Bourke," said he. "You might as well have grown anxious before I came."

"I don't know what you mean," cried Georgia, indignantly.

"Oh, yes, I think you do," he answered. "Ah, here comes Mrs. Davis; it is lucky, for we were both very stupid, and you were rapidly waxing belligerent."

"No, no, I really was not," pleaded Georgia.

He had risen, and was walking forward to meet the old lady: he only looked back and shook his head laughingly in reply to his sister's asseveration.

He gave Mrs. Davis his arm, and led her down the porch to her favorite seat.

"I think you appeared just in time, dear madam," said he, in the soft caressing tone his voice always assumed when he addressed a helpless old woman or a pretty young one. "Georgia was trying to upset my amiability."

"I don't believe that is easily done," she replied, with her pleasant smile. "But I am quite sure that Georgia is not given to teasing."

"That's right, grandma," said Georgia; "don't let him slander me; he thinks he has a right because he is my brother."

"I'll tell you what she is given to, Mrs. Davis," said Maurice, "and I know you will admit it is a very bad habit."

"Well?" asked grandma.

"She is always imagining improbable possibilities to make herself unhappy over."

"Ah, never do that, Georgia," said grandma. "When you are walking through a wood, there are always briars enough to scratch you without going in search of any."

"Good!" pronounced Maurice. "G. G. ought to copy that advice, and keep it to look at every night and morning."

After a little Georgia sauntered away into the garden, and walked up and down, wishing that she could believe her fears were imaginary. She remained pondering her perplexities longer than she was aware; the twilight had gathered without her noticing, and suddenly she heard Denis Bourke say,—

"Miss Grosvenor, grandma Davis has sent me to tell you that you must come in, for the dew is falling."

She turned back and met him coming along the path.

"Grandma believes that the dew falls at all hours," said she, trying to smile.

"You look tired," he said.

"It must be the weather," she replied; "I am sure there is a storm in the air."

An impulse seized her to tell him then and there about Herbert Caruthers, but it seemed absurd to do it in such an uncalled-for and unprovoked fashion; yet it never would be any less uncalled for until the approach of some crisis which would bring the knowledge too late, if she were right in believing that his fancy had wandered towards her during these quiet weeks.

She began talking very fast upon the first trivial subject which presented itself, and knew by his face that he was wondering what rendered her so unlike her ordinary self, but he asked no question.

When they reached the porch, they found grandma laughing at a gay skirmish between Phillis and Maurice. Georgia sat down near the old lady, but was rather silent, and for a while Denis Bourke appeared inclined to follow her example. Grandma's prejudice against the dew finally sent them all indoors, and some remark of hers about an article in one of the day's papers started Denis upon serious subjects, and the ex-

pression of certain peculiar opinions which roused even more opposition than usual in Miss Grosvenor's mind.

She perceived that she was combating his arguments with uncalled-for energy, but could not check herself. Phillis and Maurice laughed at them both for a time, but when half-past nine o'clock struck, and grandma retired to her room, they were allowed to grow as earnest as they pleased, for after Phillis returned from helping the old lady into bed—a duty never omitted—she joined Peyton, who had gone out into the porch during her absence, leaving Georgia and Bourke to the undisturbed possession of the parlor.

They had fallen upon the discussion, now grown an old subject of contention between them, of individual effort and its results, which, in Georgia's creed, required and merited personal fame and reward, considerations that Bourke rejected.

"What difference does it make," he said, "whether a man named Shakespeare or one called Bacon wrote the plays? The important thing to humanity is that the plays exist."

"But we want to know who did the work: hero-worship is natural to mankind," said Georgia.

"Exactly. We waste so much time admiring the man that we don't have half enough to study and profit by the deeds themselves. After all, what is that poking about among the private affairs of dead-and-gone celebrities but another form of the love of gossip? The schoolman need not be so severe on Mrs. Grundy for her interest in her neighbor's business. He is animated by a spirit very similar to hers, only he is too selfish to care about the joys or sorrows of those living around him. People must be dust and ashes before he can admire or sympathize."

"Really, I must congratulate you on having found a very original theory," returned Georgia. "So you would deprive us of the benefit to be gained by reading the lives of the eminent dead and elevating our petty existences by the contemplation of the epics they lived."

"No; I did not mean that; though I think we should do ourselves and others more good if we spent part of the time trying to help our neighbors to make poems out of their lives."

"Lives as petty as our own!" cried Georgia, with disdain.

"Those of dead men may seem epic in the reading," said Bourke, "because all the petty details are left out. There would be a woeful belittling of the epos if we had chronicled the hero's grumbling over a cold dinner, his irritation at a missing button, his dislike to being asked for money, his quarrelling with his wife over the color of a woman's hair,—all the small miseries which find a place in daily life, just as a tragedy has its under-current of farce, only a farce cruelly painful to the actors, however amusing it may seem to the spectator, either in written or living tragedy."

"One thing is certain," said Georgia, going back to the first difficulty; "take away the incentive of personal ambition and its reward, and you deprive men of the strongest of all motives for trying to lift themselves above their kind."

"They have no right to want to; their duty is to help lift up their fellows: any other life, no matter how fine it shows, is just as narrow as that of the laziest luxury-lover. That is the very reason famous men sooner or later reach a point where everything becomes vanity and vexation of spirit. Their aims have been selfish, and at last vigor goes out of them like air out of a pricked soap-bubble,—not always suddenly,—the prick may be so small that the air escapes slowly; but the consciousness of the emptiness always comes suddenly."

"I don't believe that is man's fault: it is the inevitable law of nature," said Georgia.

"That can't be since we recognize the perfection of nature. She is often cold and hard according to our human ideas, but she must be perfect, else she could not exist."

"I wonder how men keep alive, then. The race ought to become extinct, according to your view."

"No; because there are the elements of perfection in every created creature. It can't be otherwise, since God made them, and they must therefore be a part of God himself. Men hinder their own development, and thereby the development of the whole race, just by that putting of the personal element into their aspirations, which we call ambition and admire so hugely."

"It is a necessity."

"It is because they are not developed up to the standard which they are capable of reaching. It is, in fact, a disease, which, when human life attains a higher scale, men will be as much ashamed of admitting, as we should in our century to

have the plague of the Middle Ages, as men sometime will be ashamed of having diphtheria or typhoid fever, which we are only just growing enlightened enough to consider a misfortune, instead of perceiving it is a disgrace."

"I must decline to allow that the comparison has any significance," cried Georgia, hotly.

"The doctors tell us of a physical disease called fatty degeneration of the heart," said Denis, composedly; "there is a moral malady,—fatty degeneration of the soul; sooner or later it attacks every man, however noble his career, who puts self forward in his aims, who values fame because a personal possession."

"Oh, he must even possess a grand scorn for that! Why?—in order to show his contempt for his fellows who bestow it."

"No; it is valuable if the result of deeds which have helped men on towards the light, but valuable only in the way that wealth is,—because its possession increases its possessor's power of doing good."

"I think you would end by convincing me that, even in trying to do good, one must guard against allowing the desire to grow into a monomania," said Georgia, with irrepressible irritation.

"If Christ had owned two coats he would have given away one," said Denis. "The man who followed his example would be called mad; yet if that principle were carried through all human actions, the kingdom that he preached would be established."

"If the good things of this world were to be equally divided to-morrow, in a very few years there would be as many poor as there are now," returned she.

"Not a doubt of that," said Denis; "but the use and benefit thereof would be equally divided."

"Nothing does so much harm as indiscriminate charity."

"Nothing; in fact, there ought to be no such thing as charity; there ought to be work and pay for every man, and every man should be forced to earn it. It is the duty of the State to take care of the beggars and the improvident; but how? By providing them work, and obliging them to do it, and employing the proceeds for daily needs, and a provision for old age, and for educating their children, if they have any."

"Very fine theories; very dangerous when seized upon by bad or ignorant men."

"Begin by making education so general that there would be no ignorant; restrain bad men, but bring your law to bear upon all,—the ambitious leader as well as the thief."

"Still, we need not preach communism," said Georgia.

These words led them back to the subject of their own differences. Why Bourke's opinions should cause her such unusual irritation, Georgia could not understand; but the longer the conversation continued—and they pursued it for another full hour—the more irritated she grew, and though disturbing recollections of the discovery she had made at his house intruded now and then, and ought, she knew, to have rendered her gentle and forbearing, somehow they only increased her annoyance, and forced her on to speeches which, in the personal application he could scarcely refrain from accepting, were positively harsh and unkind.

At length she brought the talk to an abrupt close, by saying, in her coldest fine-lady tone,—

"I believe I am tired. Your eloquence is rather overwhelming, Mr. Bourke, even if I cannot call it convincing."

She saw him color, and regretted her words at once, but would not admit it: really he deserved to be punished. She called to Phillis to come and sing, but Phillis only answered by ordering Bourke to play his violin, which he had brought to the house at her and Georgia's request. Georgia, however, did not speak, though he looked at her as if to ask that she would. Phillis repeated her command with pretty imperiousness, and he obeyed, playing for half an hour in an exquisite fashion, which stirred Miss Grosvenor's very soul.

As soon as he had finished he said good-night somewhat abruptly, and went away, leaving Maurice to follow at his leisure.

CHAPTER XVII.

For a couple of days it seemed to Georgia that her rebuff had put a certain distance between her and Bourke. He had got back a shade of his old shyness, was cautious in his conversation, and, if he reached the verge of what Phillis playfully styled "an exposition," retreated with an apologetic glance at Miss Grosvenor, which at once nettled and disturbed her.

But something troubled her still more: this was Phillis's odd manner. One hour she would be in her wildest spirits, the next preoccupied and absent, and it appeared to Georgia that these changes were most perceptible after a visit from Bourke. Oh, what had she done?—what had she done? Georgia made herself very miserable, and could not decide how to act; if this style of affairs continued, she must find an excuse and go away.

She would be the vilest wretch alive if she had caused her friend real unhappiness. But she had not; Bourke must have loved Phillis for years; if his fancy had wandered a little, it would not affect his heart; he would find that had never wavered in its allegiance. But how if Phillis refused to pardon him? She was a proud girl,—an obstinate one, too,—and might punish him and herself for this lapse.

Yet, after all, the idea that Bourke had been temporarily lured away from Phillis might be a delusion of her own vanity. How contemptible she should have thought Maurice if he had indulged in a belief that he had fascinated Phillis! A week ago she had feared he might really have done so, and now she was dreading that Phillis had received a wound through her affection for Denis Bourke. Indeed, Georgia Grosvenor's inconsistencies were too ridiculous; why could she never go calmly on like other people,—amuse herself and not worry? Neither Phillis nor Bourke was hurt; there was no ground for any of her absurd fancies; even the sketch and the lines written under signified nothing whatever.

Then, just as she reached this conclusion, and was trying to derive comfort therefrom, she encountered the pair in the

garden. They had evidently been talking seriously; Bourke look embarrassed and ill at ease, and she could almost have declared there were tears in Phillis's eyes. But the girl turned away her head for a moment, then began to talk gayly, though Denis, man-like, was less successful in his efforts to appear unconcerned.

That night Phillis came into Georgia's room with a determined face.

"It is a long while since I have asked what you thought of my neighbor," she said, abruptly, sitting down opposite, so that the moonlight gave her a clear view of her friend's countenance.

She meant to have an explanation. The suddenness, the lack of circumlocution, fairly took Miss Grosvenor's breath away: she knew that if she looked as guilty as she felt, Phillis would have reason to condemn her without mercy. She could not steady her mind by reflecting that a woman capable of open speech upon such a matter must be so lacking in delicacy that her sorrows would deserve slight commiseration; she could only remember that she was sorely to blame, and long helplessly for some argument to convince her judge that she had done no irremediable harm.

Before she could speak, Phillis asked:

"Did I ever tell you how he lost his money?"

From one of those contradictory but very common impulses of human nature, Georgia found a certain bitter satisfaction in giving a fling at the man, grieved and remorseful as she was.

"On the turf,—as most English and Irish gentlemen do," she said.

"He gave it to pay the debts of a relation who had been coward enough to kill himself and leave his wife and children to be dishonored," cried Phillis, with flashing eyes.

"Maurice never told me," was all that Georgia could articulate, feeling a sudden glow at her heart, as if it had been kindled by that passionate glance.

"What do you think of that for Quixotism," demanded Phillis.

"I think it was very noble," Georgia replied, in a rather choked voice.

"Most people would call it mad," said Phillis; "but then *you are sometimes a little mad yourself, you know.*"

"Sometimes," Georgia echoed dismally, all her fears rushing back at the defiant tone.

"In your way, I mean," continued Phillis; "but that can't be Denis Bourke's way, because you and he never agree."

"Oh, I am aware that I am far from being a noble person: you needn't explain!" said Georgia, vaguely wishing she could discover a pretext for indulging in a sensation of injury.

"It seems to me time for an explanation," retorted Phillis, still in that tone of defiance.

"If—if explanations can do any good," faltered Georgia, for the first occasion in her life positively afraid of any human being's eyes.

"That remains to be seen," returned Phillis, magisterially.

"Oh, Phil, are you angry with me?" exclaimed Georgia, longing to fall at her friend's feet and sob out all her sorrow and remorse.

"I don't know yet," said Phillis; "that will be seen, too, as we get further on."

"Further on," Georgia mechanically repeated, with a shiver.

"Don't turn yourself into an echo, Miss Grosvenor. You have as independent an individuality as any person I ever met, and you can't get rid of it," pursued Phillis, with her magisterial air.

"Sometimes I feel as if I had none whatever," sighed the culprit, as if putting in a plea for mercy.

"Georgia," said Phillis, still smiting her with the fire in her eyes, "it is possible for a person to have too many feelings and too little feeling."

"I suppose so," Georgia answered, with another sigh.

"I wish you wouldn't gasp," cried her persecutor, with sudden fretfulness. "You quite put me out."

"Oh, Phil, are you in earnest or in fun?" asked Georgia, with a faint hope rising in her mind.

"Dead earnest," said Phillis. "I am very unhappy to-night, Georgia. It is not my way to howl and weep, but I mean it just as much as if I let down my back hair, talked blank verse, and shed bucketfuls of tears."

"I'm—I'm so sorry," Georgia fairly moaned.

"So am I: so there is one subject on which we agree," Phillis made answer.

"I hope there are a good many," Georgia ventured to say very feebly.

"Let us see if we agree about my neighbor," retorted Phillis.

"Oh, you mean Mr. Bourke," stammered her victim.

"Georgia, this is a bad moment to choose for pretence or affectation," cried Phillis, in a voice of mingled warning and contempt.

"I—I think very, very highly of him!" exclaimed Georgia, struggling to regain her wits, and speaking in breathless haste. "He is what you said—noble! Too visionary—too much of a Don Quixote; but one can't help admiring and honoring him for being so."

"So far, so good; but we have not got very far," observed Phillis, authoritatively.

"What more can I say? I don't approve of his theories,—that is, I think them impracticable,—but I admire him for holding them, though I believe trying to carry them out will be a sacrifice of his talents," returned Georgia, in the same breathless fashion.

"You do think him clever, then?"

"Yes,—extremely! Not a quick, showy person, but once he grasps a subject, no man has a wider or juster view." She stopped; Phillis kept silence. The possibility of perhaps setting matters right without an explanation nerved Georgia to continue. "I did think at first, Phil, it would be a pity if— if you liked him,—a waste of your beauty and gifts; but he is well worth liking. Who knows?—perhaps after all more happiness is to be found in this quiet sort of life than in any other."

Phillis turned away her head, and kept it averted as she answered, slowly,—

"Denis Bourke does not wish to pass his life with me."

The words, and the manner in which they were uttered, sent Georgia down into the depths again.

"Oh!—you—you have not quarrelled?" she exclaimed.

"Quarrelled?" repeated Phillis, in a tone so suspiciously hysterical that it seemed evident her will could not much longer control her overtaxed nerves. "What would be the use for an unprotected girl like me to quarrel with a man because—for that reason?"

"But he does wish it! he must!" cried Georgia, desper-

ately ; yet grieved as she was by Phillis's suffering, she could not help feeling disappointed in her : she would not have believed the girl capable of uttering such love-sick complaints to any living creature. " I am so sorry ! " she added again, conscious that now her exclamation meant as much regret at finding her admired friend so weak as it did sympathy.

Phillis wheeled quickly round, and her voice got back its old sullen ring as she answered,—

" People usually are sorry after they have done all the mischief they can."

" Oh, Phil, Phil ! am I to blame ? " groaned Georgia, once more wholly given up to her remorse. " I would rather have died than cause you trouble ! I never was half so fond of any woman as I am of you. I never dreamed of hurting you ! Oh ! you told me—you said—no, I did not mean that."

" I told you that even if he belonged to me, and you could take him away, I should not think him worth grieving for, I remember," Phillis rejoined. " I gave you my permission—if that was needed—to flirt with him."

" I have not flirted," cried Georgia, somewhat indignantly.

" What have you been doing ? " Phillis asked, with ominous composure.

" I didn't think at all," replied Georgia, relapsing into mournfulness. " It has been so pleasant here. I found him so different from what I expected ; I believe I wanted to atone for having underrated him ; oh, certainly I never dreamed of hurting you,—never ! "

" Why do you talk about having hurt me ? " asked Phillis. " I have no wounds to heal."

" But you said you—"

" I said Denis Bourke didn't wish to pass his life with me."

" He does ! I am sure he does ! Oh, Phil, don't let temper, false pride, come between you ! He is thoroughly good and noble,—a man of whose love any woman might be proud,—yes, for whom she might be glad to make sacrifices. His aims are so lofty that, beside them, ordinary ambition looks petty and mean. It is like breathing a purer air than that of this dusty old world, merely to listen to his conversation. Why, sometimes when he grows excited his face is fairly transfigured ; he looks positively handsome."

She stopped short ; this rhapsody was not what she had in-

tended to utter. A sudden confusion caused her to shrink into herself. She glanced timidly at Phillis. That incomprehensible young lady started out of her chair and clapped her hands, while the room rang with her laughter.

"Bravo, G. G.!" she cried. "You have given your opinion with a vengeance. It is all true, too."

"Oh, then you are not angry with me? you are sure?"

"Don't be a jibbering Georgia," returned Phillis. "My dear, I saw how wretched you were making yourself, and decided you had been remorseful long enough."

"But you do care for him?" persisted Georgia, in bewilderment.

"As much as if he were my brother; indeed I do; but in the way you mean, no more than for yours, and, if you'll excuse me, that quantum couldn't well be less."

"I'll never again believe you in earnest about anything," cried Georgia. "In mercy's name, why did you make such a scene? You do care for him."

"No, my child; but I wanted you to discover that you like him a little, and I think I have succeeded."

She ran off before Georgia could answer, and locked herself in her own room. Miss Grosvenor indulged in a tolerably energetic fit of wrath at having been deceived by her friend's comedy, then forgot her vexation in relief at discovering that Phillis was heart-whole, and straightway began in a bewildered fashion to marvel if there was any truth in the girl's last words.

Had she, Georgia Grosvenor, allowed her fancy to wander, her imagination to overpower her head? Why, now it seemed as if Phillis's speech had been a light to render clear a truth she had known before, but had refused to recognize. Yet this was absurd; her opinions had been all very well when she meant them to apply to Phillis's case, but in her own they would be as mad as Bourke's schemes. She could dismiss her late trouble from her mind; she had not hurt her friend. As for Denis, he was so enamored of his utopian dreams that he had no place in his heart for ordinary loves.

And she—she admired his talents; but like him in any romantic fashion—certainly not; she had nothing to do with romance. She must really be in earnest about going home. *Too prolonged a sojourn in this dreamy haunt would prove*

enervating, unfit her for the actual world; and that was her place. She must go back to reality,—yes, and to Mr. Caruthers. At bottom she had always intended to marry him; of course she had. She had coquetted—not with him—with herself, and it was time to cease such folly, so unkind to the man, so unworthy her womanly dignity.

She would write to him at once, accept his hand, tell Maurice she had done it, and thus put an end to further vagaries and hesitations. But before she had completed the second page of her letter she pushed the sheet impatiently aside. She was too tired to be able to collect her ideas; Phillis's ridiculous performance, following on her recent disquietude, had unnerved her. She would go to bed, and put by thought of any description until thoroughly rested.

Two long hours after, she found herself still awake, and crying softly in the dark; but where her fancies had wandered she could not have told, only that she had been vaguely dreaming of an existence into which love—real love—entered, and by the side of which common life looked dull and cold in comparison.

The next morning Phillis French wisely kept out of Georgia's way, except when grandma's presence could serve as a protection, but her exaggerated courtesy and pretence of extreme deference, while her eyes sparkled with mischief, kept Georgia in a nervous state, divided between vexation and a desire to laugh.

At last she caught the provoking girl in the spring-house; not even Cinders was there to ward off the storm. At sight of her Phillis sank into a chair, picked up a pair of garden-shears from the table, and held them out, saying,—

"They're a little dull, but you can cut my head off, if you have patience to hack long enough."

"I've three minds never to speak to you again," cried Georgia, laughing, and pulling Phillis's pretty pink ear till she shrieked. "How dare you make me so miserable by pretending to be angry and hurt?"

"Really, my dear, if you could believe me of the order of young maidens who air their heart-griefs, you deserved it all," retorted Phillis. "But I'll never behave so again, if you will only forgive me this time."

"Then we will drop the subject," said Georgia. "Of—

of course that last absurd speech of yours was only fun like the rest."

"Of course," Phillis promptly assented. "You are above weaknesses."

"I've something I think I will tell you," continued Georgia, playing softly with her friend's hair.

"Do," said Phillis, putting on her demurest expression.

"There is a man who has asked me to marry him," pursued Georgia, slowly, but without hesitation. "I said no; but he wanted me to reflect, and give him an answer later."

"And have you reflected?" Phillis asked.

"There is only one sensible thing to do; that would be plain enough to anybody who knows me," returned Georgia.

"But, Phil, you don't seem surprised! Maurice—"

"Has not given me even a hint! I can't tell you how I know, but I felt sure there was such a person! I know who he is, too,—that Mr. Caruthers you spoke of the other day." As Georgia nodded assent, she added, "I suppose your mind is made up, since you have devoted so many months to the process?"

"Certainly it ought to be."

"But is it? that's the question," demanded Phillis.

"The truth is, Phil, I am the most absurd creature in the world! I tell myself I am going to think seriously, then I find I have got miles away from the matter in hand and am dreaming like a school-girl. I believed this quiet spot would be just the place for meditation, and it has proved exactly the reverse. Why, often for days and days I have drifted on, and only woke up when I received a fresh letter to recollect I had not thought at all."

She laughed in a shamefaced fashion, but Phillis did not encourage her by so much as an answering smile.

"Then your mind is not made up?" she said, with great energy.

"Oh, at bottom it must be,—has been from the first, I should say. I can't be an utter idiot, you know!"

"Granting that you are not?"

"Why, then I must mean to marry him. A man whom I thoroughly respect, rich, distinguished—good gracious! what could I ask more?"

"What?" echoed Phillis, but her voice was so carefully

modulated that Georgia could not decide whether it expressed inquiry or simple affirmation.

"You see, Phil, you'll not think me a silly for talking about my private affairs? It is not so bad as if I were gushing over some poetical love-secret."

"There is no love in the case, then?"

"He likes me,—admires me,—thinks me oceans cleverer than I am,—but assuredly he would not break his heart if I never consented to marry him."

"That is lucky," said Phillis. "So you would not care about being loved?"

"I think it would be beautiful!"

"But troublesome, if one did not love the man, especially if he were one's husband!"

"Oh, Phil!" exclaimed Georgia, in a tone of discouragement, shivering a little too, as she often caught herself doing when she carried her thoughts far enough to contemplate Mr. Caruthers, even momentarily, in a marital light. "You understand I am not bound in the least," she continued, rapidly. "I have given no encouragement: neither he nor my own conscience could blame me if I decided—"

"In his favor," interrupted Phillis.

"Ah, now you are cruel!" said Georgia, at last able to take refuge in a sense of injury. "If I bore you, admit it; but don't tease or laugh."

"I do not intend to, Georgia. The question seems to me perfectly natural."

"Yes, I see what you mean," sighed Miss Grosvenor. "Well, if I refuse him, he could not accuse me of having trifled. If I accept him, I think I know myself sufficiently to be certain he would have no grounds for complaint."

"And you could be happy?"

"Oh, happy!" repeated Georgia, fretfully, then added, "surely I ought! He offers me just the life for which I am fitted. My ambition is vicarious, I fancy, and sharing his career would satisfy it fully."

"Then, if you want to marry from ambition, say yes at once, and end the matter."

"Not simply from that motive, any more than from a mere desire to be rich. You can't think so meanly of me."

"I don't think meanly of you at all."

"Respect,—esteem,—sympathy! What other sensible reasons could a woman have for marrying?"

"None, if we regard marriage as a civil contract, an ordinary partnership which can be dissolved without trouble, without scandal," Phillis answered. "But you can't make marriage that: it is the joining of two lives so closely that, if they do not form one existence, wretchedness must ensue. Think of living year after year with a man you do not love,—flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone. Ugh! I will never do it, if I live to the age of Sarah or any other of the female patriarchs."

She began speaking calmly enough, but closed her sentence with such force that both she and Georgia laughed, though the latter looked somewhat pale and uneasy. She saw that Phillis was watching her, and presently said, in a languid tone,—

"I fancy few people in this age regard matrimony in that exceedingly elevated, enthusiastic fashion,—at least, people who live in what we call the world."

"I should say, from what I have read, that among the favored class you mention, matrimony is an affair of buying and selling."

"Oh, of course that is just the nonsense of novel-writers."

"I am glad to hear it," said Phillis. "Certainly it would never be in your case, I know that. Therefore, if you are content with respect and—oh, all the moral words you named,—why, marry your Mr. Caruthers, and receive my blessing."

"The only sensible basis for marriage!" Georgia repeated, with increased decision. Then there followed a brief silence, which somehow disturbed her, and she asked, quickly, "What are you thinking about, P. French, staring out over the garden like a sibyl?"

"This, if you want to know," replied Phillis, facing her again. "Suppose that, after marrying on that basis of reason, a woman met a man whom she loved: what then?"

"No decent, clean-minded woman would allow herself even to recognize the sentiment, under such circumstances," cried Georgia, with a sort of desperation.

"Still, a good many women, refined and pure, have fallen into such difficulties," Phillis answered, a tremor of pity in her voice.

"Poor weak creatures, not worthy the name!" asserted Georgia, *with a hardness so unlike her usual sentiments that*

she expected her friend to expostulate; but Phillis only observed,—

“They say, too, that very often after marriage men are not content with simple esteem; they want the woman’s heart.”

“Then the man would be breaking his pledge,—would prove himself false to the terms he had accepted.”

“What could the woman do? Leave him?”

“A separation! Oh! Phil, Phil!”

“Then she would have to live on,—to drag on and suffer,” said Phillis.

“She must make herself sure of the man in advance.”

“Can he be sure of himself?” Phillis asked.

“People gradually grow towards each other when there is a community of tastes and interests,” said Georgia. “As for love-matches, you know as well as I that they seldom turn out well.”

“Matches made from romance, fancy, very youthful impulse, do not, I admit.”

“And generally love is nothing else!” cried Georgia. “There is such a thing as love, but I don’t believe that one human being out of scores—oh, thousands—ever knows the feeling; a good many people are not capable of it. I’m not, for instance.”

Phillis meditated again, then she said,—

“Since you are so thoroughly convinced what is best for you, I am surprised that you have been so long making up your mind.”

“It must be just because I am a born procrastinator! I know what I ought to do. I am sure I mean to do it. Still, I keep putting off—putting off!”

“Well, my dear, nobody can help you.”

“That’s what Maurice says. Aunt Conyngham doesn’t think so, and she has dosed me with advice till I wonder she has not brought me to hate the subject.”

“But did not her opinions agree with yours?”

“I suppose it is her way of stating them which irritates me. She is so terribly worldly and hard.”

“And I’ve heard you often pride yourself on being worldly too.”

“Not pride myself. I admit that I am.”

“Are you sorry for it?”

"Oh, I don't know! I'm what life has made me, and must be satisfied. Other people too must be satisfied to take me as I am," cried Georgia, with the fretful intonation coming again into her voice.

"You'll excuse me, I think that's trash. Of course I am only offering my humble opinion," said Phillis, very meekly.

"You despise me, Phil!" exclaimed Georgia.

"No; I am sorry for you," she replied.

"I don't just see why," said Georgia, coloring.

"Perhaps you will some day," returned Phillis, fixing upon her a glance so penetrating that Georgia grew confused and troubled. She said, hastily,—

"Well, I don't mean to run away yet: so I have still time to reflect."

Then she remembered that only the night before she had determined to go at once, and felt vexed enough with her own inconsistencies.

"Still time," echoed Phillis, in that oracular, mysterious way of hers, which so often exasperated her friend.

"All the same I know my mind is made up," persisted Georgia, with an obstinacy which seemed uncalled for except on the supposition that she was trying to convince herself against her own convictions. She feared that Phillis might tell her as much, but that young lady only answered,—

"Then you can be quite at rest and enjoy your quiet."

"Y—yes, now I have got over my fright. You were dreadfully wicked last night, Phil."

"But you promised to forgive me."

"Only I wonder you don't like Denis Bourke, and he you."

"You see, there are no worldly considerations to influence us, and we don't regard respect as a sufficient basis for marriage."

"Don't tease. You will both find out at last."

"Miss Grosvenor among the prophets!" cried Phillis. "Well, my dear, I can only say that, judging from Denis's performance when he lunched here yesterday, he has not gone very far. I told him he reminded me of the young woman of Deal, with her raspberry jam and seven platefuls of veal."

Georgia laughed: if Bourke did not care for Phillis, anything which went to show that Phillis did not appear to think he was indulging a fancy for any other woman, she found a comfort.

"But you must like somebody, sooner or later, Phil," she said.

"Why, any more than you?"

"I said like. I can go so far."

"I don't mind telling you that there is something which would keep me from ever liking a man in the way you mean," replied Phillis, calmly. "You need not look to see if I mean it. I am in earnest; but that is all I intend to say."

"Phil, was I right? Has there been something worrying you during these last days?" demanded Georgia, with eager sympathy.

"Yes, but something entirely unconnected with any one near me! Now I have reason to think I worried myself needlessly."

Her suspicion that Phillis's life held some painful secret was so strengthened by these words that Georgia could not resist saying,—

"Phil, if you were ever bothered and I could help, you would let me? You would prove that we were friends?"

"Yes," Phillis answered, as quietly as before. She rose, and began a minute examination of the milk-pans; presently she turned towards Georgia again, laid a hand on each of her shoulders, and said, "Georgia, you are as good as gold,—ever so much better than you know. Here comes Sykes, and I must scold him: so run away, and don't make me lose any more time."

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON the day which ended this fresh week, the two young men went out shooting, and late in the afternoon Georgia proposed to Phillis that they should go and meet the pair as they came down from the hills. But Phillis was detained by the appearance of Miss Raines with some needle-work she had been intrusted with, and which was not accomplished according to that young lady's over-fastidious ideas.

"Don't you stop," she said to Georgia. "I must struggle with that lath-and-plaster woman. I'll find you by the pond

or in the meadow. I shall be sure to see you all as you come down the hill."

"Oh, let the work go! it will do well enough," pleaded Georgia.

"Use towels hemmed in that fashion!" cried Phillis, indignantly. "Never! I'd wipe my face on a leaf first. No, no! that antique virgin has been paid in advance for her performance, and she shall not put me off with imitation sewing. I shall tell her she must have forgotten to put on her spectacles: that will hurt her worse than anything else I could say."

"Poor Miss Raines!" laughed Georgia. "I foresee that she will pass a very bad quarter of an hour. Well, I shall take a walk: those lazy men won't get back for another hour. Good-by. I'll meet you at the lake."

Miss Raines was not an easy person to vanquish, and she stood up gallantly to the contest. But she had to yield at length, as experience must have taught her would be the case when she attempted to impose on Phillis. Perhaps the spinster enjoyed the struggle; for she did not own herself defeated until she had gone through every phase of emotion, from anger to pathos. She went away, as she always did after similar discussions, with a profound respect for her conqueror, because more than a match for her powers,—something, Miss Raines often declared, which no other woman in the county could boast. As for counting any man even as her equal, that Miss Raines would have scorned to do; indeed, she seemed to regard male humanity as a lamentable failure on the part of nature, only atoned for by her success where the feminine sex was concerned.

Phillis set out for her walk, but found so much to attract her attention that her progress was slow. Once in the wood, the spell deepened. She had a fancy that nature was full of rhymes, the leaves murmuring in cadence with the song of the brook, the breeze continuing the strain,—all in harmony, down to the chirp of the tiniest insect that tuned its infinitesimal pipe among the odorous mosses.

When she reached the lake, Georgia was not in sight: so she stopped to rest on a fallen tree-trunk, gazing out across the bright expanse of water, and watching the lights and shadows flicker over its surface, like troops of many-colored birds.

She was not absorbed, as nine people out of ten would have been, in some day-dream : her mind remained concentrated on the lovely scene, and enjoyed its every detail. The circumstances of her life had taught her to cultivate this enviable faculty to its full extent, so that in seasons of the deepest anxiety she was able to put dreary reflections by, except when a necessity for decision upon any point rendered earnest thought necessary. Even then she wasted no time in wondering why this or that must be so. She bent all her energies to the study of what mode of action would most quickly ameliorate the situation.

She was in one of her sunniest moods to-day,—a reaction from the uneasy suspense of the previous week ; that set at rest, her elastic spirits had sprung up with renewed vigor.

"The Lady of the Lake, the spirit of the waters," said a laughing voice behind her. "By what title must one address your highness, in order to ask permission to intrude upon your solitude?"

She turned her head and saw Maurice Peyton beside her, looking wonderfully handsome in his shooting-dress, his gun slung over his shoulder, his hat off, showing the rich mass of auburn curls, damp from the exertion of a long tramp.

"Don't bother me with rhymes," said she ; "I'd as lief you flung conundrums at me."

"Did I make a rhyme ? You see that comes of being a born poet ! I fall into them unconsciously," replied he.

"Take care you don't fall hard enough to hurt yourself," retorted she. "Have you succeeded in murdering anything?"

He held up a brace of quail and a partridge.

"These are for your grandmother," he observed.

"You will find her at the house," she answered.

"Thanks ; perhaps I had better go there," he said, half nettled at her manner.

"She will be very glad to see you, I have no doubt," replied Phillis, with preternatural gravity.

"Apparently that is more than her grand-daughter can say for herself," he remarked, still a little stiff, and inclined to be aggressive after a prolonged battle they had indulged in on the previous evening.

"Her grand-daughter has no necessity for making personal

confessions so long as you make them for her,—such apt ones too!" said Phillis.

"I see you are still in a belligerent mood, Miss French."

"I see that you are still determined that I shall be, Mr. Peyton."

"Do you want me to go?" he asked.

"I had not thought."

"I suppose you could tell so much without thinking."

"Yes," said Phillis.

"Then I will wish you good-by for the present."

"Good-by," she answered.

He walked away; a few paces off he looked back, and asked, with much suavity,—

"Did you call me, Miss French?"

"I did not, but I will since you want me to,—Mr. Peyton!"

He returned to her side.

"At your service," he said.

"You don't look as if you were," she averred.

"Well, I must admit that after last evening—"

"Ah, yes, you wish to apologize?"

"For your having hurt my feelings?"

"Did I? Well then, I forgive *you*; human magnanimity could not go further," she said, with a laugh so mischievous and merry that he could not resist joining therein, though he still tried to preserve his injured air.

"Where is Mr. Bourke?" she asked. "I trust you have not assassinated him along with the quail."

"He stopped at the house for something. I notice you never forget to ask after him. I wonder if you would do as much for me if I disappeared for a whole week?"

"If you try it we shall be able to discover."

"Now, I did not want to quarrel to-day!" cried he, leaning his gun against a tree and sitting down beside her.

"But your demons are too powerful for you—is that it? because you certainly seem determined to quarrel," she said.

"That is not just the way I should put the matter."

"But that is my way: so you know it must be the right one. Do you know it?" she continued, as he hesitated about replying. "If you say you do not, I shall not speak to you for three days."

He knew well that she was quite capable of fulfilling her threat, so he hastened to exclaim,—

“Yes, yes! I’ll say anything you like.”

“That shows what respect you have for truth,” returned she. “You are a very ill-brought-up young man, Mr. Peyton.”

“Upon my word, since I came here I have been brought up with a vengeance!”

“When I see my duty clearly, I always do it,” said Phillis, with superb complacency. “You owe me a great deal, Sir Maurice.”

She looked so exasperatingly pretty that he longed to fall at her feet and kiss her hands and rave out protestations of love. How much would have been real, how much the effect she produced upon his fancy, he could not have told.

“Indeed I do,” he answered; “you have worried me more—yes, made me suffer more—than any other woman I ever met.”

“Does it seem to be neuralgia?” she asked, assuming an air of grave interest. “Grandma has a famous lotion for any trouble of that sort.”

“I wish her grand-daughter had a little heart,” he cried.

“What good would that be?” she asked, with her most tantalizing smile, while her eyes seemed daring him to continue: he had ventured further already than he had ever before done.

“It would depend on herself whether it was any good to me,” he replied, and as soon as the words were uttered realized that he had gone beyond the limits of flirtation and reached serious ground. How would she receive the speech? What did he mean? Was he in earnest? Did he love her, or was it only that she had charmed him by her beauty and her mental gifts until he was like an intoxicated man, unable to take account of his own emotions?

Phillis sat quite still, looking at him in a somewhat surprised, somewhat meditative fashion: one might have said she was trying to decide what his language really signified. Suddenly she turned her head away. He fancied, but could not be sure, that before she did so he saw a swift wave of color pass over her cheeks. He did not reflect,—did not pause to question what he intended, what his own feelings were,—but he could not resist the impulse which hurried

him on to discover if the inexplicable girl really cared for him.

"Phillis!" he exclaimed. "Phillis!"

She glanced back at him. Yes, her cheeks had taken on a deeper shade of carnation.

"I was christened so, but I don't remember ever giving you permission to use the name," she said, and voice and manner were half forbidding, half provocative, just calculated to urge on the impulsive man.

"Will you give me the right?" he asked.

"The right!" she repeated.

"The privilege,—the blessed privilege!" he exclaimed. "Such a sweet name. Phillis! ah, if you knew how often I have said it over and over to myself, and wondered if the time would ever come when you would permit me to address you by it!"

Great heavens! what was he saying? What influence impelled him? The excitement of the moment,—his innate passion of coquetry?—or did he love her? Whatever the feeling, it was too strong for him to resist, though even amid the hurry of his thoughts he recognized that, after this, he could never get back to their former relations, half friendship, half flirtation; and if she took him in earnest,—if she cared! Then he was speaking again before the swift reflections had fairly coursed through his brain.

"Will you permit me?—may I call you Phillis?" he demanded, with his eager eyes upon her.

"The people who really like me call me P. French: how would that compromise suit you?" she asked.

Though she spoke playfully, the calmness of her face was somewhat disturbed. Her lips quivered slightly, and the rose tints came and went in her cheeks; her eyes were cast down so that he could not read their language. He could not tell whether she might be jesting, whether she were at least partly serious; and he must know,—he must! Afterwards he might reproach himself for having been ungenerous, unmanly even,—might feel an utter villain if proved to himself not to be in earnest, and so were to cause her pain. But just now he was too thoroughly subjugated by his master passion (in which it seemed to him that real feeling mingled) *to reflect; he must know if she cared,—he must.*

He looked splendidly handsome at this moment; it would have been difficult for any woman, unless her heart were fully occupied, not to have been moved by that combination of physical and intellectual beauty.

"Would that suit?" she asked, playing with some parti-colored leaves she had picked up.

"No," he said; "I want something more than all your friends share,—something for myself alone. Don't laugh! don't tease! I swear, so perplexing a creature never lived! No woman ever owned such fascinations, either. You would turn the head of a saint—oh, Phillis, Phillis!"

He stopped short; she had lifted her eyes: two daggers in the sunlight could not have sent a hotter blaze into his. She leaned back so as to rest against the tree, and still fixed him with that imperious gaze.

"You'd better go no further," she said, coldly. "A moderate degree of impertinence I can endure, but an insult I should never forgive."

"An impertinence!—an insult! Good God!" he exclaimed, so excited now that he would have hurried on to assert that he loved her,—ask her to become his wife,—but she gave him no opportunity.

"I will exonerate you so far as to admit that I do not think you meant it; but it was an impertinence," she said. "So you could not be content? Your man's miserable vanity impelled you to discover whether your fascinations had not touched the simple country-girl's heart. You wanted that zest for your pastime! Whether the girl suffered was no matter; you wanted something to smile over when you are gone,—to be able to say, 'Poor thing, she was awfully fond of me!'"

She spoke rapidly, but with no excitement; her voice was so cold that it seemed to freeze all traces of scorn or bitterness out of her bitter words.

"Great heavens! how can you misjudge me so?" he began, and then stopped, convicted by his conscience and heartily ashamed. Now he knew that he was in earnest, and would have given the world to make her believe in his love, but he felt that he never could: she had read his mind like a book. No after-effort, no patient perseverance, would ever convince her of his truth; and, as he realized this, he remembered

that through his own idiotic vanity he had lost the possible chance of winning a woman whose affection would be better worth possessing than that of any he had ever met.

"Ah," said she, "you have the grace to be ashamed; you could not finish that falsehood! Come, there is a little hope for you yet; there are vain men more petty than you."

Maurice turned white as death; her taunts roused him to fury, yet he recognized their justice. He felt utterly degraded, but his anger helped him to a kind of composure.

"I can only beg your pardon," he said. "I did not dream that the expression of respectful admiration could offend you so deeply."

"Oh, that is what your creed calls respectful admiration! I'll tell you what it is in mine. I'm only an ignorant young woman, remember, not accustomed to dealing with grand gentlemen from the great world—"

"Oh!"

"I was speaking!" cried she, imperiously. "I call coquetry, which could make a man want to discover if he had touched a woman's heart just to amuse himself, utter baseness!"

"Perhaps if you had heard me out you might have discovered what I did mean," cried he.

"Perhaps you meant to ask me to marry you," she retorted.

"I did," he answered; and he was so much in earnest that he really believed such had been his intention from the first.

Her eyes softened magically; she glanced at him with her sweetest smile.

"Ah!" she murmured softly. "Well, do you mean to ask me now?"

Another revulsion of feeling on his part: the indelicacy of the speech shocked him. She cared; she had only wanted to be sure that he meant to beg her to become his wife; had indulged in a scene just to force him on; behaved like the most hardened husband-hunter to be found among the women in society who had worn out youth and freshness—yes, decent womanly reticence—in their pursuit! And he must ask her: he could not retreat. And there she sat looking at him with that heavenly smile, growing each instant more lovely,—yet her loveliness hateful in his eyes since now he perceived her drift, her artfulness, her treachery.

"Do you?" she asked, again.

"Yes," he cried, in a voice so shaken by contending emotions that even a very acute woman might have believed him moved by passion. "Will you marry me?"

She remained silent for an instant,—an instant which seemed an age to him. He was so disappointed in her; he had thought her so frank, so feminine, so true; and to find her as artful and calculating as the worldly creatures whom he abhorred, was a terrible shock. He waited for her to speak; she could answer; he had done his part.

"It is very kind of you," said she, plaintively.

She stopped, so he had to speak; all he could manage to articulate was,—

"Kind is an odd word to employ."

"Very pretty of you, then,—very proper, if you prefer. My best thanks, Mr. Peyton; but circumstances over which I have no control compel me to decline your flattering offer."

She was perfectly in earnest, he could see that. His mind was in a stranger whirl than before; he heard himself saying, without in the least knowing what he meant,—

"I suppose I must not ask what circumstances?"

"First, because I am not in want of a husband at present," said Phillis, in a methodical tone; "secondly, because I cannot fancy myself selecting (admire my choice of words) you, if you were the only man on the face of the earth."

"I thank you!" cried he, bitterly.

"I really think you ought," said she; "and I hope the little lesson may be of service to you."

Now, man-like, an injured feeling became prominent in his bewilderment.

"So it is you who have been amusing yourself,—flirting!" he exclaimed, but was conscious that his voice sounded too cross for his reproaches to possess any pathos. "It seems to be my feelings—the possibility of my being hurt—which was of no consequence."

Phillis began to laugh.

"Take care," she said; "you have got safely out of a bad scrape, don't rush into a worse one. If you wax sentimental a second time, I may accept you, after all."

Again Maurice could have sworn that his feeling was real; the delight of finding that she was not worldly and crafty sent her higher in his esteem than before.

"If I could convince you that I had been in earnest!" he exclaimed.

She rose at once.

"If you were to talk any more nonsense, you would never speak to me again," she said. "There are limits to my patience. I warn you that you have reached them."

"Oh, I will be careful not to offend you by any further expression of feeling," said he, with bitter irony.

"You see," she said, calmly, "now that you have forced me to show you that, though simple, I am not quite an idiot, you would not amuse me any longer."

"I have amused you, then?"

"Very much." And her hearty laughter proved the truth of her assertion. "Come, now, are we friends or foes?"

Seven men out of ten would have made asses of themselves, but Maurice was too clever to do that. There was but one way, if he wished her to consider him sensible,—worth liking: he must accept his lesson, and behave afterwards as if no explosion had taken place.

"Friends," said he, holding out his hand.

"Good," pronounced Phillis. "We shall get on admirably now. What on earth can have become of Georgia?—unless she has met Denis."

"No, Denis was not coming down at present."

They walked back through the wood and reached the field beyond, Phillis talking as gayly as if no storm had arisen, and Maurice doing his part very well, though he was still a good deal dazed, most of all by the consciousness, which grew stronger and stronger, that he had from the first been much more in earnest than he knew, and that now he was as many fathoms deep in love as any woman could have desired. But would Phillis ever be brought to believe this, and, if he succeeded in convincing her, would she ever learn to care for him? That seemed very doubtful, and Maurice's heart sank. Never in his life had he felt so humble, so diffident in regard to his own powers, as at this moment.

"Hark!" exclaimed Phillis, suddenly; "I am sure that was Georgia's voice. Something has frightened her."

Away she ran with the fleetness of a wild animal, and Maurice ran too. They turned an angle of the alder-thicket just in time to see Georgia sink fainting in Denis Bourke's arms.

CHAPTER XIX.

MISS GROSVENOR had wandered away up towards the hills. Just as she remembered that it must be late enough to go in search of Phillis, she saw Maurice in the distance, descending the zigzag path which led from Bourke's house to the lake, and said to herself,—

"He will walk home with Phil. I needn't go now. They don't especially want me, and I feel too moody to laugh at their nonsense."

For indeed her state of mind was the reverse of cheerful. Only that morning she had received a letter from Mr. Caruthers which contained cogent reasons why she should arrive without delay at a decision in regard to his proposal, and she found herself as far off—oh, it seemed to her farther—from such possibility, as she had been weeks and weeks before.

The American minister at a prominent continental court desired to send in his resignation. The President had privately offered the position to Mr. Caruthers, who knew that his nomination would be readily confirmed by the Senate when the winter session began.

He wrote Georgia that her response would regulate his conduct. If she favored his suit, he should accept the minister-ship; if compelled still to live his life alone, incessant occupation would be best for him, and he should toil on in his arduous professional career.

The letter was admirably conceived and written, straightforward, manly, and replete with feeling. He asked her to pardon his long and determined pursuit, and assured her that, though the time originally set for her decision had come and passed, only this new aspect of his affairs would have induced him to urge her so strongly to end his suspense. He told her that an affirmative answer would make him a happier man than before meeting her he had ever expected to be; if condemned to disappointment, he should at least hold to the honor of ranking himself among her most devoted friends.

Georgia saw clearly a truth against which she had hitherto—*somewhat obstinately*, she feared now—closed her eyes. Her-

bert Caruthers loved her ; he was not animated by the calm, decorous sentiments with which his wooing had begun. He loved her ! He did not talk of his affection, but it breathed through every line, and Georgia knew that a refusal might very probably sadden his whole future, for at his age he was less likely to seek consolation elsewhere than a younger man would have been.

But the very fact of his loving her must render her marrying him a rank injustice ! What had she to give in return ? While she believed him influenced by esteem and sympathy, she could bestow as much as he offered ; but love ! And if she were to say yes, the marriage must follow so soon. Somehow the bare idea sent a shiver through her veins ! Yet what insanity it would be to decline his offer, and, since he was content with such feeling as she could bestow, why refuse ? What personal reason had she for so doing ?

Again, as had of late often happened when discussing the matter with herself, something seemed to stir at her heart, as if there were a secret hidden there which she was afraid to contemplate. But what possible secret ? Nonsense ! none. Her own absurd fright when she found the sketch Bourke had made of her, aided by Phillis's wicked melodramatic performance later, had roused this fear in her mind. It was too silly ! She, Georgia Grosvenor, the worldly and ambitious, suddenly to turn romantic and indulge in girlish dreams. No, no ! Whatever decision she might come to in regard to Mr. Caruthers, no sentimental vision, no poetical myth, would influence her : she could be certain of that.

While meditating, she had walked to and fro near the foot of the hill, sometimes slowly, sometimes hurrying on as if towards some definite goal. At length she suddenly discovered that she was very tired, and sat down to rest on a flat rock which afforded a very comfortable seat, as the almost perpendicular ledge from whence it projected formed a back, rising to a considerable height, bald and bare, except for a few juniper- and whortleberry-bushes that had lodged their roots in the crevices.

When Georgia first came to stay at the Nest, she had rather avoided the place, declaring that the ledge with its numerous chinks and openings, and the broad stone bench near the bottom, *exposed all day to the sun*, seemed to her especially de-

signed by nature as an abode for snakes, and snakes were her horror. But Phyllis and Bourke, and everybody about, had assured her that she would never see a reptile of any sort there; up on the mountain, even rattlesnakes were plentiful enough, but only twice within ten years had a member of the species been known to venture so far down. Familiarity with the spot, more than argument, had caused Georgia gradually to forget her fears,—forget them, indeed, so completely that she often came there and rested in the soft autumn sunshine.

It was very still; now and then a distant sheep-bell tinkled, or a crow circled over her head, calling hoarsely, or a company of thrushes settled for a few moments in the group of walnut-trees near and discussed their autumn flight; apparently with much diversity of opinion, and once a rabbit scuttled past and hid himself in the underbrush; but otherwise there was scarcely a sound to break the deep revery into which Georgia allowed her mind to float.

She was roused suddenly by a noise so peculiar that it could not fail to attract her attention, absorbed as she was,—a noise more like the shaking together of a string of metallic beads than anything else. At the same instant a chipmunk darted out from a clump of bushes and ran directly across her lap. She turned and saw, scarcely more than four feet distant, a huge rattlesnake just coiling for a spring.

She jumped from the rock; as she did so, the snake sprang. She felt a weight on her skirt, and looked back. The reptile's length had enabled him to strike the hem of her dress, and with such force that his fangs settled so deeply into the woollen material that he could not extricate them.

Georgia uttered a despairing cry and tried to run, dragging the hideous wriggling creature after her. She was conscious that in another moment she should faint, and be utterly helpless when he succeeded in freeing himself, which he was struggling fiercely to do, his tail lashing her garments in his fury with blows which might have been given by an iron bar.

A second time Georgia cried out desperately; as she did so, round the farther end of the ledge dashed Denis Bourke, calling,—

“Miss Grosvenor, Miss Grosvenor!”

She pointed with her hand; she could not speak. He saw

the snake : she was gazing at it over her shoulder in horrified fascination, its fiery eyes gleaming straight into her own. It succeeded in liberating its fangs,—gave one low dreadful hiss. At the same instant Bourke gained her side. He carried a heavily-loaded walking-stick ; a well-directed blow descended directly on the reptile's head,—another, and another. The creature slowly straightened to its full length, the ominous rattle sounding faintly once again, then it lay still.

"You are safe !" cried Bourke. "Safe !"

Georgia heard, realized that the danger was over, strove to collect herself to speak, staggered forward, and he caught her just in time to keep her from falling. She felt herself held close to his heart,—heard him moan,—

"Oh, my God ! My darling !—my life !"

He was so mad with a horrible fear that she might have been bitten before he reached the spot, that he lost all power of restraint.

"Georgia," he groaned, "dearest, you are not hurt ?"

She could only shake her head, then she slowly fainted in his arms. The last conscious thought in her mind—it came, too, with startling distinctness, paralyzed as were her faculties,—was that he loved her. In that instant she knew also what had been the secret in her own heart, from any recognition of which she had so determinedly shut her eyes during these past days : she loved him in return.

When Georgia's senses returned, she was lying on the ground, with her head in Phillis's lap, Maurice bending over her, Denis Bourke standing at a little distance. She glanced from one white face to the other, tried to smile, to lift her head, but Phillis held her fast, saying,—

"Lie still a little ! You were not hurt ?"

"No, no : he was fast to my dress—oh !" The unutterable horror of those seconds came back with such force that she could not continue : she closed her eyes and lay silent in Phillis's arms. Presently she said, with a faint smile, "I am not much of a heroine, you see !"

Maurice endeavored to answer playfully, but his voice broke ; he could only lean forward and kiss her forehead. Phillis was for once so unnerved that she could find no words,—could only fold Georgia closer in her embrace ; while Denis Bourke stood aloof, pale and silent, looking at them with eyes

which showed a hungry envy of their liberty to give expression to their solicitude and love.

At length Georgia could sit up, and was so far restored that they might think of returning homeward. Phillis and Maurice essayed to talk, asking little commonplace questions as to how she felt, endeavoring to speak lightly, sensible enough to know that the wisest thing was to occupy her with any trifle that would come uppermost and so keep her mind from dwelling on what had happened; but Bourke did not attempt to aid them; he still stood leaning on his stick gazing at Georgia.

As they helped her to rise, she glanced towards him for the first time, saying, somewhat tremulously,—

“I have not thanked Mr. Bourke yet.”

She held out her hand; he stepped forward and took it for an instant in his, looking wistfully down at the white fingers as a man might regard some priceless treasure placed within his reach only to be withdrawn and leave him lonelier from that momentary possession.

“God bless you, old man!” Maurice exclaimed, in a choked voice, tried to laugh, and ended by uttering a sound suspiciously like a repressed sob. Phillis French stole a quick glance at him; nobody perceived it, but there was an enthusiastic admiration therein which neither his beauty nor his wit had ever won from her.

Georgia’s eyes met Bourke’s; as Maurice spoke, she gently pushed her hand upwards; Denis’s lips softly brushed her palm. She knew it was wrong; she knew that he must be aware she had caught the wild words he uttered in his mortal terror, and this action on her side might appear a tacit encouragement. But she could not resist the impulse which impelled her, and, as she felt the pressure of his lips, she realized anew that this man loved her, that she loved him, and that they must part forever!

She withdrew her hand. Phillis and Maurice supported her on either side, and they walked slowly along the path, Bourke following. Now and then Phillis or Maurice strove to jest, but death had been too near; it was a pain to try to ignore what had happened: so after a little they went on in silence.

When they reached the house, Phillis insisted on Georgia’s

lying down upon a lounge in the sitting-room. Grandma administered one of the wonderful remedies she always had on hand to fit every case, and declared that her patient must keep quiet and not speak or be spoken to for a while. So the two young men very unwillingly took their leave, Maurice telling Phillis that they would return later. On the way they stopped to look at the dead snake: it measured good four feet and a half, and the rattles, which Bourke cut off, numbered eleven.

"My God! Denis, if you had not happened to come by this path!" Maurice exclaimed.

"Yes: don't talk about it now; better think of something else."

They walked on rather silently after that. On their arrival at the house they found Mistress Tabitha in a state of excitement, because they had promised to be back half an hour earlier, and she feared that her dish of mountain brook-trout baked in cream might have suffered in consequence of the delay. But the trout proved excellent, so Tabitha's mind was set at rest. Bourke brought out a bottle of his choicest claret, and the meal passed off pleasantly enough, though neither of the young men yet felt equal to any allusion to what had occurred.

Later, they strolled back to the Nest through the moonlight. Grandma assured them that Georgia was better, but so much shaken that, after drinking some tea, she had gone to bed.

Presently Phillis came down-stairs and told Peyton that Georgia wished to see him.

"But you must not stop: she is still a good deal excited, and ought not to talk," Phillis said. As he hurried off, she added to Bourke, "Georgia wished me to bid you good-night for her."

"I hope she will sleep," was all he answered, then turned away and sat down by grandma, talking with her upon some unimportant subject connected with the affairs of the neighborhood.

Phillis stood leaning against one of the rustic posts which supported the veranda, looking out into the moonlight, till Maurice appeared again, saying,—

"She seems all right, I think."

"She will be in the morning," Phillis replied. "I must go and sit with her till she falls asleep, so I shall take my leave

of you both. Grandma will let you stop awhile if you are very quiet and discreet."

But they knew that grandma's early bedtime was near, so did not avail themselves of the permission. After bidding the old lady good-night, Maurice held out his hand to Phillis somewhat hesitatingly. She presented hers without a shade of difference from her ordinary manner, speaking a few pleasant words, apparently utterly oblivious of the scene in the wood, which, now that he was free enough from anxiety about his sister to recall it, caused Maurice a thrill of such strangely-mingled sensations that he could not tell whether he felt most humiliated or excited.

It might have hurt his vanity anew had he known that Phillis French gave the matter no thought. She would later, and would doubtless torment him enough, but at present her mind was entirely occupied with Georgia and Georgia's affairs. Phillis had a faculty of reading people's secrets almost equal to that possessed by a clairvoyant, and she comprehended perfectly the new revelation which had come to her friend, confident it was that rather than the fright which had so completely unnerved the proud woman.

"Come in, Phil; I hear you," Georgia called, as her hostess paused at the chamber door. "Sit down here by the bed; it quiets me to have you hold my hand."

"I want you to go to sleep as soon as you can," returned Phillis, as she complied with the request.

"I will. I'm afraid you must all think me a dreadfully cowardly idiot," said Georgia, with a little nervous laugh.

"Indeed we don't!" cried Phillis, indignantly. "You were as courageous as possible."

"Maurice has gone?"

"Yes. I said good-night for you to Denis Bourke. He hopes you will sleep."

"Thanks," Georgia answered, in an undertone.

She was somewhat restless for a while, but gradually what she always laughingly called Phillis's magnetic influence helped her to grow quiet. At last she said suddenly,—

"I am a coward, though, Phil, at bottom. I used to think myself very brave, but I am not."

Phillis understood that she was not referring to the accident, but to the new aspect which life had assumed, and the

puzzle which her own character became under the influence of this change. Still Phillis only said,—

"I suppose we all feel like that sometimes."

"I used to pride myself on my determination," Georgia continued, in a broken fashion, as if thinking aloud,—“my ability, when I had made up my mind, to be firm and settled; and now-a-days I seem as unsteady as a weather-cock, and just when I think I am most decided I discover I am more at sea than ever.”

"Oh, how you are mixing up your comparisons!" replied Phillis, playfully. "You are not just to yourself, either. I fancy all of us, as we grow older, find it difficult to have the same serenely blind confidence in our own decision that we had at sixteen."

"Perhaps so," sighed Georgia. "But I don't seem to know myself in this new aspect, and I don't like that. I hate to feel a hesitating idiot,—not to be sure what I really want to do."

"Patience!" said Phillis; "you will work your way out into the daylight at last."

"At present the mist is so thick I can't tell in which direction to turn," half whispered Georgia.

"Then stand still, and wait till the mist lifts a little," Phillis replied.

"Ah!" ejaculated Georgia, in a voice which showed that the advice gave her a certain sensation of content; but presently she resumed, in an altered tone, "I have been standing still so long, I must make up my mind now. I declare, Phil, I am half sorry I ever came here; not but what I have enjoyed my stay."

"I hope so, Georgia."

"And I love you,—you know that. But, you see, this quiet makes the old life seem so noisy, so hurried, it is like going away out of an enchanted land, where all was still, to leave this place."

"Yet you would not like to live here always?"

"How could I? But just now it seems as if that would be pleasant; but I could not do it. No; I am only fit for the existence I was reared in; it is ridiculous of me to feel as if I wished not to take it up again. Oh, dear, how like a goose I am talking! Are you laughing at me, Phil?"

"Indeed I am not."

"I'm such a selfish creature,—that must lie at the bottom," pursued Georgia. "I must always come first,—that everlasting I."

"After all, one's self has to be thought of when it is one's future, one's whole life, that is under consideration," Phillis answered, gently, smoothing her friend's hair as she spoke,—voice and manner so tender and sympathetic that even an entire stranger would have found comfort therein.

"I suppose one must," Georgia assented, slowly. "Yet I don't know—I—" She left her sentence unfinished; Phillis still gently stroked her hair, but did not speak. After a while Miss Grosvenor asked, abruptly, "Phil, would you have to be in love in order to marry?"

"Indeed I should,—very deeply too," Phillis responded, promptly.

There was another pause, then Georgia said,—

"I must try to sleep! Sing to me, Phil,—softly, so as not to wake grandma."

Phillis sang a quaint old ballad in a half voice, and Georgia lay quiet, with her face turned away, but Phillis knew she was weeping, knew too that tears would relieve her, steady her nerves, and enable her to rest.

And before long Georgia sank into a sound slumber; she was too thoroughly exhausted for even the confusion in her mind to keep her awake. Phillis remained by her for some time, still stroking her hair and gazing down into her face with eyes full of tenderness, then she rose and went noiselessly into her own room, leaving both doors open, so that she might be sure to hear in case Georgia should waken and need companionship.

It was late the next morning when Miss Grosvenor woke from her long, dreamless repose. Through the open window she caught the tones of her brother and grandma, as they sat conversing in the veranda. She raised herself, and listened breathlessly for another voice, and experienced a sensation of mingled relief and disappointment because it did not reach her ear. Phillis was on the watch, and entered as soon as she heard Georgia stirring. Her voice shook a little when she began to speak, and she held her friend fast in a warm embrace, but she speedily controlled herself, and rattled on in her usual gay fashion, while assisting Georgia to dress.

"We have had such happenings, G. G.!" she cried. "That greedy red heifer nearly choked herself with half a pumpkin; there's a new litter of the prettiest little pink-and-white pigs ever you saw; Miss Raines has ruined one of your finest white jackets by applying an iron too hot, and at present is moaning like a Banshee in the wash-house; Cinders has broken my Wedgwood teapot, and—"

"Mercy!" interrupted Georgia. "Isn't the list ended yet?"

"There is nothing else, except that Denis Bourke has gone to Philadelphia. He received a telegram that sent him off at daylight, and he'll not be back till to-morrow evening."

"No bad news, I hope?" Georgia asked, with well-feigned composure.

"Oh, no! business of some sort. Your brother is downstairs flattering grandma in the most outrageous manner, and you shall have your breakfast in the porch, as a reward for having slept so well. Ninny has made you corn-muffins as a tender attention, so get yourself ready and descend to the lower regions! I am off to the laundry, for now that Ann Raines has begun to go astray, if I leave her unwatched, she will burn every stitch of our clothing before she returns to sanity."

Georgia joined grandma and Maurice, and, with their eyes upon her, did not dare to neglect her breakfast, though she had no appetite. There was a certain restraint between the brother and sister, but each remained unconscious that the other felt it. Georgia feared Maurice might perceive some sign of her odd state of mind, and he was so possessed by his new sentiments towards Phillis that he had constantly to guard against betrayal thereof.

He discovered where the young lady had gone, and after a while departed in search of her. Georgia reposed for a time in grandma's society, then went back to her own room. She did not venture to dwell upon the adventure of the previous day: beyond a hearty thankfulness for her preservation, she put the fright and horror as much as possible out of her mind.

Turning over her portfolios and books by way of occupation, she came upon her half-finished letter to Herbert Caruthers,—the letter she had begun, meaning to tell him that she would become his wife. The sight of the page, and the recollection of her intentions, sent an icy chill through her

whole frame. She tore the sheet with nervous energy, and hid the fragments in shuddering haste, as if evidences against her of some crime punishable by human laws. The idea that she could ever have meant to complete and send the letter, oppressed her with a sensation of horrible guilt. She seemed to have lived years since that epistle was begun; her former resolves presented themselves like hideous sins with which she had been weak enough to tamper, towards which she had been base enough to incline.

She could never wed Herbert Caruthers; to do so would be moral and physical degradation, for she loved Denis Bourke; useless to bring argument or sophistry between her and that truth,—she loved Denis! What was she to do? Marry him! Impossible! Throw away her life,—give up the world,—bury herself alive? No, she could not: her affection did not possess the depth necessary for such sacrifice! Indeed, the whole thing was a mad folly: it would pass,—it must! Ah, if Denis were different!—if he would make a career for himself!—with his talents and energy he could easily do so. But he was bound fast to his impracticable theories, and she could not join him therein; no woman living could be so little fitted to attempt such renunciation of this world's pleasures and splendors!

She thought of hurrying away before Bourke returned; but if she went to her aunt, she must meet Mr. Caruthers; she could not do that yet, nor could she visit gay friends; she must remain at the Nest for the present; she must battle against her own insanity and subdue it.

While Georgia suffered the torment of her thoughts, Maurice had peeped into the laundry and fluttered Miss Raines, but not Phillis. She was fluting some dainty ruffles, and she allowed him to sit down by the table, making him undergo that species of persecution which is at once sweet and bitter to endure, but wholly delightful to look back upon.

CHAPTER XX.

GEORGIA wished with the remorseful heartiness we all fling into wishes when framed too late, that she had weeks before told Bourke of the terms on which she stood with Mr. Caruthers.

It would have saved them both trouble, because at that time she could have declared, without any violation of the truth, that she meant to marry her rich suitor. It would have been, too, the only honest, straightforward course after the discovery of her portrait in Bourke's house warned her that she might possess the power to disturb his peace of mind. Now he could almost claim the right to reproach her for having trifled with his feelings, and if he pressed her close she should be unable to take refuge in the declaration that, sooner or later, she proposed to become Mr. Caruthers's wife.

It was late in the afternoon of the day succeeding Bourke's return, not yet the hour for him and Maurice to appear at the Nest, so she went into the garden, intending later to seek Phillis's protection and so avoid the risk of the private interview with Denis, which she knew must come, but longed to defer, though scorning the desire as cowardly.

As she sat in the woodbine arbor she heard a step on the green sward, and looking up, saw Bourke before her. One glance at his face showed her that it wore the expression of dogged resolve she had so often seen it assume, and she knew she could not escape the explanation she had weakly hoped to put off still further, even while wishing it uttered and done with.

"How you startled me!" she exclaimed, trying to laugh. "You must come shod with what somebody calls the shoes of silence."

"Oh, I made noise enough," he replied, "but you were too much absorbed to hear,—dreaming, I should say."

"I do very little of that even when asleep, and I assure you I am much too prosaic to indulge in anything of the sort during waking hours," she said, hoping that he might notice the warning her words held.

He stood silent, gazing down at her fixedly. Any other man would have returned some laughing answer, and so rendered conversation easy on her part. She longed to grow vexed with him for standing there mute, as if reflecting over her speech, but could not.

"Where is Maurice?" she asked, with an effort repressing an undignified inclination to run away.

"I left him writing letters which he declared must be finished for to-night's post."

"I know; they ought to have been written four days ago. I never saw such a creature to procrastinate."

"I never can," replied Bourke; "not that it is any merit, only because I never can find a moment's peace till I have got off my mind whatever has to be done."

"You may be grateful for the inability," she said.

He paid no attention to her remark, just stood looking at her still; she hoped devoutly she might find herself waxing irritated, the sensation would make her task so much easier.

Suddenly he broke the pause:

"I have told you my secret already, so you know what brings me here."

It was coming; speak he would. She could not even assume an air of not understanding what he meant.

"I am sure to say it all awkwardly," he hurried on, according to his habit when excitement overcame his ordinary slowness, even hesitancy of speech, "but I must say it. You heard me the other day; you know the truth,—I love you—I love you! Now, what have you to answer me, Georgia?"

There he stood, seeming to loom taller and bigger than ever, a slight pallor visible through the sun-burn of his complexion, his gray eyes at once so soft and determined, his manner so respectful and constrained, yet at the same time so eager and masterful, everything in looks and words so different from what another man's wooing would have been. She felt quite breathless, frightened too at the sense of subjugation which came over her. And before she could find language he was speaking again:

"You like me a little, you know; you found it out the other day. Don't call me impertinent; you know it is true, and why shouldn't we tell each other the truth? We agreed long ago that subterfuges between men and women are petty

and contemptible! You discovered some time since that I loved you; you found that sketch. I saw you just after you left the house, and you had dropped your handkerchief by the brook. Georgia Grosvenor, what do you mean to do with my life and yours? Yes, yours, because you care,—you care,—and you can't put me out of the reckoning. I wish I could say it better, it sounds so rough. But you feel—you must—that no man ever loved you so truly—that—”

“Ah, stop, stop!” she gained voice to articulate. “You—you frighten me!”

And her trembling showed that he did, she so proud, so self-controlled!

He sat down on the bench beside her, saying, gently,—

“Forgive me! Poor little girl, I didn't mean to!”

He took her two hands, and she passively permitted him. Great heavens! what was she about? She drew quickly back; he did not attempt to detain the cold fingers.

“You are right,” he said; “I will only have what you grant me. Will you give me the dear hands, Georgia?”

He bent forward and gazed straight into her troubled eyes with an expression of tenderness which was like a caress, and which set her heart beating so violently that she almost feared he would hear its pulsations. What spell had he cast upon her? But she must break it; he must hear the truth.

“Don't—don't talk in that way,” she said, wondering, even in the midst of her agitation, if it could really be she, Georgia Grosvenor, shrinking like a timid school-girl from the man who had come there as a suppliant and yet behaved like a master,—nay, was so, she had to admit. “Listen to me, there are so many things I want to tell you.”

“First own that you care for me,” he broke in.

“Let me speak!” she exclaimed, with a sudden imperious ring in her voice, but it sprang from desperation.

“You do care!—you do!” he persisted. “Georgia, Georgia, you care!”

“Yes, then,” she fairly groaned. “But it only makes it the worse for you and me; there can be nothing between us,—nothing!”

He smiled down upon her,—oh, that beautiful smile, which she had sometimes seen absolutely transfigure his countenance in moments of enthusiasm, but never as it did at this moment.

"Now you may explain," he said, in a low, deep tone, full of content. "You have admitted that you care. Whatever you have to tell, I can keep hope: you care!"

"Oh, I think you are cruel!" cried Georgia, bewildered between the yielding of her heart and the struggle of her will.

"I am not," he answered; "you know I am not. Speak, Georgia! What do you mean by its being the worse for you and me?"

"I have told you—we must part—I must go away—oh, I ought to have gone long ago!"

Each broken sentence was a confession of her weakness: she comprehended this,—she saw in his eyes what joy it gave him; he was smiling again.

"Gone where—to what?" he asked. "Amusements,—balls,—Newport gayeties? You have said you were tired of them; said the excitement wearied you; the constant change an empty sameness after all."

His words were so true. Oh, she was doing her cause no good; she must be strong, firm against herself and him. She exerted her will powerfully, and looked away from his face; she could speak now,—could explain.

"Not to those things as the aim of life," she said. "Yes, in that light they are wearisome; but to have them fill a reasonable part of existence, to keep a place in the world, possess interests as I grow older—to—"

Again her momentary control deserted her as she remembered the disclosure she must make, and she cried out, nervously,—

"Oh, this is what I really want to tell you!"

"Tell me," he said, gently.

"I—I— Ah, what an idiot I am!" she exclaimed, ignominiously forced by emotion to pause again, leaving her avowal unuttered.

"Look at me, Georgia," he whispered.

But she would not; rather, she dared not. She kept her eyes fixed on the laurel-bush in front of the arbor, trying to count the blossoms, in order to steady her mind a little; he waited in silence.

"I came here for a purpose," she said, slowly, when she had regained composure enough to continue. "A man had asked me to marry him—"

"But you were not engaged," he interrupted.

If she could only answer in the affirmative, and so end this painful scene. But her lips refused to frame the falsehood.

"You were not engaged!" he repeated, more authoritatively.

"No, then," she cried, with a kind of mild impatience. "I wanted to be quiet,—to reflect. His offer was everything I could desire,—wealth, position; I respected, admired him. I wanted to have freedom to decide."

"And you could not decide to become his wife, for you did not love him?"

Oh, he was beating her at every point. But she had conquered her temporary prostration; she could be resolute; at any cost, she must end matters.

"I told you I was prosaic," she said, in the coldest tone her voice would assume. "Love is for poetry and novels: it does not belong to the world I live in."

"Don't mock," he said, sternly, as she paused, unable to conclude her sentence with the hardness befitting the opinions she expressed.

"At all events, I am not mocking you," she rejoined, hearing her voice begin to shake anew.

"I could forgive that," he replied, earnestly, "but you are mocking all the noble instincts of your own nature. Oh, it is blasphemy! and you know it."

Again she struggled with herself; she felt ready to weep, and strove with all her might to hide her weakness beneath an icy coating of pride.

"You must allow me to explain," she said, haughtily. "My views of life may not please you, but I have a right to them."

"Yes, to your real views; but don't advance the sophistries which you have already found so poor and vain; don't, for your own sake."

"I mean to be honest; I do mean to be," she pleaded, with sudden humility.

"And you will be," he answered. "You are too noble to accept for truths those deceptions which you have tried to force upon yourself as gospel. You know that the idea with which you came here must be relinquished; you can never marry any man while conscious that you care for another."

"Then I tell you frankly I do not mean to care. I mean

to root out the sentiment,—live it down,” she cried, passionately. “That sounds brutal; but I cannot help that. Perhaps it is rude; but I can’t help that either. You force me to speak, so you must not be angry.”

He bent his head until she could not avoid meeting his gaze, and said, softly,—

“Could I be angry when you say you should have something to root out, to live down?”

“You are the most impossible man to deal with that I ever met!” she exclaimed. “I am behaving like a child of fifteen! I should not have said a sentiment: it is just a dream, a folly. Oh, you oblige me to be so hard!”

He only whispered anew,—

“I love you, Georgia—I love you!” Again he held out his hand, adding, “Give me yours, Georgia.”

She hesitated an instant; their eyes met. She allowed her fingers to drop shyly into his palm; then she reflected that it was only her hesitation, not the act itself, which could be construed as important, and tried to do away with any effect thereof by saying, with a forced laugh,—

“Certainly, friends may shake hands; we have done so scores of times.”

But his fingers did not close over hers; he gazed longingly down at the beautiful hand resting in his, then glanced back at her and smiled.

“Georgia! Georgia!” he cried.

Before he could add more, the sound of wheels stopping at the gate became audible. Georgia stepped forward to where she could peep through the thicket of lilac-bushes which separated the garden from the lawn. She caught sight of the carriage; a gentleman had descended, and was helping a lady to alight.

“Aunt Conyngham!” exclaimed Georgia, in astonishment. “My aunt and Mr. Caruthers.”

“Ah,” said Bourke, calmly, “that is the gentleman you tried to bring yourself to marry.”

She turned upon him with indignant eyes.

“How do you know?” she demanded.

“I see it in your face. I see, too, that you are not particularly pleased to have him come here, nor your aunt either.”

Georgia ran past him without a word, and hastened down

the path to meet the new arrivals. Bourke followed leisurely; he could watch the meeting, hear what was said.

"Why, aunt, I can hardly believe my eyes!" cried Georgia.

"My dearest, dearest girl!" responded the elegant lady, and then the two embraced cordially.

"A very handsome woman," thought Bourke,—*"as obstinate as a mule, and prouder than Lucifer!"*

"May I not be spoken to?" asked a pleasant voice, as Georgia and her aunt ended their kiss of salutation.

"How do you do, Mr. Caruthers?" Georgia said, turning towards the speaker. Bourke turned too and gazed steadily at the gentleman, trying to form an impartial judgment of his appearance. He was a fine-looking man,—rather stately, perhaps a little stiff, but imposing enough, and young enough also, to be likely to prove a dangerous rival, especially when one took into consideration all the worldly advantages on his side. "I hope you are quite well," continued Georgia, as she shook hands with her admirer.

"She does not say she is glad to see him," thought Denis Bourke.

"One hardly needs to ask after your health, Miss Grosvenor," said Mr. Caruthers; "I never saw such a change in a few months."

"Wonderfully improved," cried Aunt Conyngham, noticing the tall young man in the background, and wondering who on earth he might be. "It is positively incredible, Georgia dear!"

"Oh, I wrote you that I had grown both brown and fat," returned Miss Grosvenor, laughing. "But do tell me how you happen to appear in this unexpected fashion? Why, you never gave me the least hint of any such pleasant idea on your part!"

"Explanations will do later," thought Bourke; "I may as well be presented, and make the fact of my existence patent to our aunt and her ally, for of course she supports him tooth and nail."

Before Mrs. Conyngham could answer her niece's remark, Bourke stepped forward. He betrayed no signs of the shyness or awkwardness which had roused Georgia's scornful commiseration when he first met her. He was as composed and calm as Mr. Caruthers himself, to all appearance; in-

wardly, indeed, he felt a certain glow and elation of spirits; he had a battle to fight, and he meant to fight desperately.

"Aunt Conyngham," said Georgia, "let me present Mr. Bourke, an old friend of Maurice's. They used to know each other in England."

"Oh! Delighted, I am sure!" cried Aunt Conyngham, with great cordiality. "An old friend of my bad boy's cannot be a stranger to me, Mr. Bourke."

"Thanks," he said, bowing, perfectly at ease under her smiling but searching glance. Georgia saw that he was, and it gratified her.

"Mr. Caruthers, let me make you and Mr. Bourke acquainted," she continued.

The two men saluted each other, and exchanged a few amiable commonplaces in tones that suited the words.

"And where is Maurice?" demanded Aunt Conyngham.

"Somewhere about: he was here awhile ago," returned Georgia, glancing at Bourke, as if she rather expected him to offer to go in search of her brother, but he did not appear to catch her idea, and said,—

"He is sure to be along presently."

"And now do tell me, Aunt Conyngham, how you lost your way and strayed into these wilds?" questioned Georgia.

"Found my way, you mean," said her relative, laughing.

"And such a picturesque way, too," added Mr. Caruthers.

"But that's not an explanation," said Georgia, playfully.

At this instant Phillis and Maurice, who had been for a walk (and a quarrel), appeared at the gate. Mrs. Conyngham and Caruthers were standing with their backs in that direction, and Peyton got quite close before he recognized the visitors.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed, hurrying forward. The new-comers turned, and of course there followed a cordial greeting.

"Oh, you bad boy! to give me this frightful journey in order to have a little of your society!" cried the aunt, but, even while embracing her nephew, genuinely rejoiced to see her favorite again, she was able to study Phillis, and marvel who the pretty, elegant creature could possibly be.

"Aunt," said Georgia, "this is my dear friend Miss French. I have talked so much about you to her, and writ-

ten so much about her to you, that I shall expect you to feel like old acquaintances."

"I am very, very happy to meet you, Miss French," said Aunt Conyngham, in a delighted tone. But she was so overpowered by surprise that for once she somewhat forgot her usual tact, and as soon as Georgia had presented Mr. Caruthers she added, "Why, I thought—I—I mean it is the same name, but it surely cannot be Miss French who—who—"

"Oh, yes, it is I who keep the boarding-house," cried Phillis gayly, as Mrs. Conyngham hesitated a little over the close of her phrase.

"Then I wish I were fortunate enough to live here," that lady answered quickly, somewhat disturbed by her own *lupsus lingue*, perceiving too by the expression in Georgia's face that she must be careful where Phillis French was concerned. "It is the loveliest spot I ever saw," and somehow she managed by glance and voice to make her compliment include the mistress of the place. By this time she was holding Phillis's hand in both of hers, and looking at her with an admiration agreeable to witness, and thinking all the while that she wished the girl were at the antipodes, or at the bottom of the sea, or in any safe haunt inaccessible to her inflammatory nephew. And now she turned to that young gentleman, and said, "So you are astonished to see us, Maurice?"

"I am never astonished," he replied: "it is against my principles."

"Oh, you provoking creature!" said Aunt Conyngham.

"But one is glad to learn that Sir Maurice possesses a principle of any description; eh, Georgia?" added Phillis, with a laughing freedom which caused Aunt Conyngham inwardly to shiver.

"Don't slander me to my nearest relations, Miss Phillis!" retorted Peyton. "At all events, I am awfully glad to see you, aunt, if that will atone for not feeling astonished."

His eyes met Phillis's as he spoke, and her mischievous orbs said so plainly, "You may be glad, but you don't look it!" that he had much ado not to laugh outright.

"You've not yet told me how you found your way here," said Georgia; "and Mr. Caruthers seems equally mysterious."

"Only perfectly contented to have found it," returned he, with a bow and smile.

"Sir Charles Grandison revived!" thought Phillis, and began studying his manner, with the express intention of being able to caricature him later for Maurice's and Denis Bourke's benefit.

In the mean time, Aunt Conyngham had rushed into voluble explanation, knowing that she must account to her niece for Mr. Caruthers's appearance, else that wayward young lady might make him suffer for venturing to come.

"You see, my dear, I had to go to town, and when I got there I found those dreadful workpeople still in the house,—such confusion! I had learned, Maurice, that we could sell that land of ours. I'm so bad at business letters, and I was dying for a peep at Georgia and you! Last evening Mr. Caruthers was good-natured enough to pay me a visit, and I persuaded him to pioneer me out. You know I can't travel alone, and my maid is worse than nobody, and Thomas has been indiscreet enough to fall ill."

"It was a very happy inspiration on your part," said Maurice, "and more than kind on that of Caruthers."

"Mrs. Conyngham seemed to dread the solitary journey as much as if it were a pilgrimage to Mecca," rejoined that gentleman, with a glance half questioning, half apologetic, towards Georgia.

"And so you sacrificed yourself," returned she; but, though her voice was playful enough, Mr. Caruthers feared that she was not too well pleased at his arrival.

"You had raved so over the region that I was anxious to see it," added Mrs. Conyngham, secretly sharing Mr. Caruthers's suspicion. "Anything finer than the road over the mountain I never saw."

Then she rendered the conversation general for a few moments, caused Phillis and Bourke to talk, and gratified both niece and nephew by treating their friends to her sunniest smiles and most honeyed words.

Presently Georgia inquired,—

"Where are you stopping, aunt?"

"At the Wachuset House, the hotel just on the edge of the town; very comfortable it seems, too. We got in a little after one, dined early, and, when I had rested, drove out to find you."

"Then, since you have dined," said Phillis, "I may ven-

ture to ask you both to share our nondescript evening meal; I don't know what name to give it; eh, Georgia?"

"It is sure to be uncommonly good, whatever one you choose," said Maurice, smiling at her.

"Now, for that flattering speech you and Mr. Bourke shall be allowed to stop too," said Phillis.

Aunt Conyngham heard and saw and took note of all these little evidences of familiar intercourse, but gave no sign. She treated Phillis to more sweet phrases, and expressed her pleasure at being invited to remain.

Presently Phillis disappeared to give orders to Ninny; and Georgia, seeing that grandma had come out into the porch, led the way thither, and the visitors were presented to the old lady, who looked as placid and sweet as usual, and received them with a quaint, old-fashioned grace, which both were discerning enough thoroughly to appreciate.

"What a picture she is!" thought Aunt Conyngham; "and what a marvel of a girl! And this Denis Bourke, sprung from goodness knows where, an old friend of Maurice's too! Hum! I think my coming was a happy inspiration, indeed."

She exerted herself to be agreeable, and so did Mr. Caruthers, who appeared especially inclined to regard Bourke with favorable eyes.

They had a charming supper; and when the moon rose, Aunt Conyngham declared that, much as she regretted the fact, it really was time for them to depart; so the horses—upon which Sykes had, by Phillis's orders, bestowed bounteous hospitality—were brought round. But before they came Aunt Conyngham said,—

"I suppose you could hardly get ready to go back with me to-night, Georgia dear, could you?"

"Go back?"

"To the hotel: you'll stop there with me, won't you? Of course I took that for granted; I shall be so solitary else."

Georgia, who all the evening had been a little nervous, glanced towards Maurice for support. He nodded slightly. She knew that meant she was to hold her own.

"Oh, aunt, I really cannot change Phillis's delightful home for a crowded hotel!" she pleaded.

"She is my prisoner while she remains in these parts, Mrs. Conyngham," added Phillis, coming to the rescue.

"A very willing one, I am sure," returned the elder lady; "but—"

"Oh, it is much better she should stop where she is, aunt," said Maurice, pleasantly, yet with a certain authority in his tone.

"It would oblige me to pack twice," said Georgia; "and the idea of doing that would incline me to suicide."

"Besides," continued Maurice, "you would see nothing of her, for she would always be running off in search of Miss French; whereas if she stays here she'll get over to see you daily."

Aunt Conyngham knew how to submit gracefully to the inevitable, sorely as she hated to yield her will in any matter, large or small, but in her thoughts she put the onus on Phillis, and grew less well disposed than before towards that young woman, though she waxed more expansive and admiring, so far as smiles and words went. Everybody was deceived except Phillis herself. She instinctively felt that Mrs. Conyngham's friendliness was a mere pretence, though she certainly only amused her.

"Georgia and I will drive over to see you in the morning, aunt," Maurice said.

"And do come early," Mrs. Conyngham urged. "You and I must settle that tiresome business first of all."

"It won't take long, we will hope," sighed her lazy nephew.

"And when I am rested you must all show me the wonders of the region. You promise, Mr. Bourke?"

"I shall be must happy to do my share."

"There must be any number of charming excursions to make," Mr. Caruthers said to Georgia.

"Oh, yes," she answered, with a lack of enthusiasm which was noticed by Aunt Conyngham, who observed, quickly,—

"We must enjoy one or two, Georgia, and then you and I will talk about setting a day for our return to town."

"Yes," said Georgia again.

She knew that she ought to be glad of her aunt's opportune arrival; it seemed like an actual interposition of fate to save her from any perilous consequences of her own folly and weakness; but down in her heart she was not glad. Then, too, she regarded Mr. Caruthers's coming in the light of a liberty, and managed, though very friendly and cordial, to let

him perceive something of her sentiments, which roused in his mind a fear that he had blundered in yielding to Mrs. Conyngham's proposal that they should surprise her niece and nephew by a visit and discover the real motive which induced them to prolong their stay in such an out-of-the-way spot so many weeks beyond what appeared necessary or reasonable.

They all walked to the gate together, and stood there for a few moments engaged in uttering more gay and pleasant last words ; but at length the adieus really ended, and the carriage drove off.

As soon as it was at a safe distance, and before either of the four had spoken, Phillis sat down on a convenient bench, and began to laugh with all her might.

"Are you so daring as to flout my respected aunt?" demanded Maurice, joining in her merriment, as did Georgia and Bourke; for Phillis's silvery, ringing laugh was always irresistibly infectious.

"I am laughing at you," replied Phillis, as soon as she could speak.

"Thanks," he said.

"And at Georgia," added Phillis.

"Well, I'm obliged also," cried her friend.

"Two runaway children," continued Phillis; "but Argus has come. Oh, my goodness, won't you pass a terrible hour to-morrow morning! But Argus is very charming, and so is stately Mr. Caruthers. Oh, Georgia, can't you be good-natured, and make arrangements for his falling in love with me?"

"He is safe enough to do it; you needn't trouble!" exclaimed Maurice, half smiling, half pouting.

Phillis rose and thanked him by an elaborate courtesy.

"That is consoling," said she. "Do you really believe he is right, Denis Bourke?" she added, in an anxious voice.

"I hope so, with all my heart," returned Bourke.

As he spoke, he gave Georgia a glance so full of meaning that she suddenly discovered the air had grown chilly and that it was time to go in.

Phillis unceremoniously ordered the two young men to leave her premises, and they departed, sorely against their wills.

CHAPTER XXI.

If the others slept no more than Georgia that night, they were to be pitied ; and, though she tried to turn the hours to account by holding a serious communion with herself, it proved singularly unsatisfactory,—worse, very painful.

The next morning she and Maurice fulfilled their promise of going over to Wachuset. It was characteristic of both that they only talked upon indifferent subjects during almost the whole drive ; but when they were entering the town, Georgia said,—

“You will stand by me, Maurice, and not let Aunt Conyngham torment me quite out of my senses ?”

“Indeed she shall not ! But you know in her heart she is afraid of you.”

“I can’t have scenes just now. If she should choose the rôle of martyr it would be worse than scolding.”

“She sha’n’t worry you,” said Maurice.

They left the conversation there, but Peyton comprehended that, for the present at least, Mr. Caruthers’s chance had dwindled to nothingness, and wondered how it would all end.

That gentleman himself was sitting in the veranda of the hotel as the carriage drove up, and he obtained a friendly greeting from Miss Grosvenor.

“Mrs. Conyngham told me I was to convoy you to her sitting-room,” he said, after the first salutations were over.

Georgia was glad to put off a *tête-à-tête* with her relative as long as possible, and so received his proposition very graciously. The three went up-stairs, and Aunt Conyngham greeted her young relatives rapturously. They talked for a while, then she remarked, with dignified playfulness,—

“Now I am going to send you two men off to smoke. I’ve not had Georgia to myself a minute yet. After that, Maurice, you and I must settle our business, because I have promised to telegraph an answer to-morrow.”

“Peyton, I suppose we must submit to be banished,” said Mr. Caruthers.

“If you go with a good grace, perhaps, later, Georgia will

take you to visit that waterfall she was raving over last night," rejoined Aunt Conyngham.

"That idea will give me courage, if Miss Grosvenor promises," he said, laughingly.

Of course Georgia was obliged to assent, but the thought of having to hold two troublesome interviews in succession rendered her both impatient and nervous.

As soon as the door closed on the pair, Aunt Conyngham exclaimed, enthusiastically,—

"Upon my word, my dearest child, you are handsomer than ever; though you don't look as robust as I expected from your letters."

"I have not been quite well these last few days," Georgia answered.

Then it occurred to her that it might be an assistance in defending herself from her aunt's sharp eyes to give a physical reason so good that no idea of any mental confusion or trouble would present itself to that lady. She began speaking of her adventure, though it was an effort.

"Maurice told me last night," Mrs. Conyngham said, interrupting her at the first words. "We won't talk of it. Oh, my dear! But there! I needn't make a goose of myself and upset you!" The tears were in her eyes, and she kissed Georgia heartily. "I assure you I felt like kissing Mr. Bourke too," she continued. "He seems such a nice fellow,—one of *the* Bourkes, Maurice tells me. Not handsome, you know, but intelligent, good manners; not like an American,—no style. Ah, my dear, after all, when our countrymen are well bred, they have no equals for ease and elegance; you must admit that."

Georgia knew what this meant. Once, when Mrs. Conyngham had wished her niece to marry a titled Englishman, the sons of Albion had been the theme of her admiration. On another occasion a Spaniard of "high degree" was the aspirant, and the men of the Latin races roused her to enthusiasm. At present the males of Columbia had their turn,—of course the praise couched in general terms being meant to apply to Mr. Caruthers.

"You must admit that, Georgia," repeated Aunt Conyngham.

"Oh, I dare say," returned Georgia, though less enthusiastically than pleased her relative.

"Maurice told me all about his friend," she continued.

"My love, the man must be a little mad, you know. Why, by this time an American, under similar circumstances, would have made a fortune,—gone into politics, been on the high-road, far on too, to everything heart could wish; and here Mr. Bourke lives in this out-of-the-way spot, a common farmer, quite content, also—"

"Scarcely a common farmer," said Georgia.

"A lack of energy, no doubt," pursued Aunt Conyngham. "Irishmen are always indolent,—always improvident."

"Don't forget that my father was part Irish," said Georgia, laughing.

"Oh, an admixture of the blood is not a bad thing; but a genuine Paddy, my dear,—they're all alike."

Georgia showed no inclination to do battle for the men of the Emerald Isle, and indeed Mrs. Conyngham had not indulged in her diatribe from any fear that her niece had the slightest weakness for the special specimen under consideration. She thought she knew too well the girl whom she had brought up, to believe her capable of such insanity; but it was the lady's habit when she praised one person to find some other whom she could blame or speak slightly of,—perhaps in order to keep an even balance of mind.

"Miss French seems a charming girl," said Aunt Conyngham.

"The cleverest, the most delightful, in every way, that I ever knew," replied Georgia, and her voice was enthusiastic enough now.

"I hope she will not take Maurice's nonsense seriously. He always flirts with every pretty girl he comes near."

"She is a good deal more than a match for Maurice," said Georgia; "and the truth is, he is in raptures over her."

Georgia knew this was malicious, but she felt that she should perhaps spare herself a little if she set Aunt Conyngham to watch her brother, and he would not care.

"He has been so over scores and scores of women," cried the elder lady. "But she—"

"Cares nothing about him."

"Oh!" said Aunt Conyngham, in a tone of relief. "I suppose she will end by marrying the Irishman."

"That would seem a very natural conclusion," Georgia answered, with praiseworthy composure.

She began to think that now her aunt would get round to Mr. Caruthers; but no, she talked of Newport, of the visits she had paid since leaving there, mutual friends, late fashions, new books, and was as entertaining and agreeable as possible. At last she said,—

“Now I must send you away. Maurice and I have got to make up our minds about those houses. Will you be amiable and amuse Mr. Caruthers for a while?”

“Of course,” said Georgia.

“It was so very kind of him to come with me! That stupid Thomas!—to fall ill just now: you know I can’t undertake a journey alone, and Rosalie is an encumbrance instead of a help,—can’t even learn to buy a railway-ticket.”

“She exhausted her talents in learning to dress hair.”

“Oh, there she is an angel!” cried Aunt Conyngham. “Just ring the bell, dear, and have somebody find those tiresome men.”

“They are coming,” Georgia said. “I hear Maurice’s voice in the hall.”

“Punctual for once, Maurice,” said Aunt Conyngham, as the two gentlemen entered; “but it is thanks to Mr. Caruthers, I know.”

“That is the way my relatives always receive any attempt on my part at practising the virtues,” Maurice declared. “The only wonder is that I have the grandeur of soul to keep on trying.”

“Oh! oh! oh!” groaned the trio of listeners.

“Envy, malice, and all the rest of it!” cried Maurice. “Take yourself off, Georgia Grosvenor, and carry Caruthers with you; but, mind, we have to be back by noon.”

“You are going to spend the day here. I fully expected it,” said Mrs. Conyngham.

“Impossible! Forty things to do,” vowed Maurice.

“But, Georgia—”

“Must go with me: she’s got to write my letters,” Maurice averred, with bland persistency, and received a very grateful glance from his sister. “But we will ride over towards evening, and bring Bourke and Miss French. By the way, Bourke has organized an expedition for to-morrow: you are all to dine with him after. He’ll tell you about it this evening.”

Aunt Conyngham saw that she must resign herself, so she

did it with her usual grace : but Mr. Caruthers could not hide a look of disappointment at hearing that he was to possess Georgia's society for only an hour.

"At least we shall have time to visit the waterfall, Miss Grosvenor?" he questioned, trying to speak cheerfully, in obedience to a glance from Mrs. Conyngham.

"Oh, yes ; it is not a long walk," she replied, a little coldly, having with feminine quickness intercepted her aunt's warning.

As soon as the pair were safely out of hearing, Mrs. Conyngham said, eagerly,—

"Now, Maurice, do tell me,—has Georgia decided to accept Mr. Caruthers, or is she going to be as mad as she has been in so many other cases?"

"I don't think she really knows herself," returned Maurice, with provoking indifference. "But I should say that his coming here was a false move: she has said nothing, but I can see she doesn't like it."

"Oh, I explained to her ; she is quite satisfied. Your letters have been terribly unsatisfactory. I do hope you have done all you could to persuade her to behave sensibly."

"My dear aunt, I will neither make nor mar in the matter : I told you so when I first got back," said Maurice. "If Georgia thinks she can be happy with Caruthers, well and good ; if not, she must send him adrift, as she has done her other swains."

"But she can't keep on doing that ! Why, soon she will no longer be very young. If her health stays delicate, she will go off dreadfully in her looks, and then—"

Aunt Conyngham held up her hands in despair of expressing in words what would be the consequences.

"She never was so handsome as now," said Peyton, "so you need not be worried just yet."

"That is true. But oh, Maurice, it would be awful for her to reject him ! Only think !—so rich—so clever !"

"But if she doesn't love him ?"

"Oh, if you have grown romantic I've no more to say !" cried Aunt Conyngham, scornfully. "It is a new phase in you, certainly."

"Country air has caused it, no doubt," replied Maurice, teasingly.

His aunt longed to sneer and hint something in regard to Phillis, but did not venture, having too wholesome an awe of Maurice's temper to venture on liberties with him. So she contented herself with deserting raillery for higher grounds, and said, in a tone of lofty morality,—

“Marriage is too serious a subject to be contemplated by the light of youthful dreams and fancies. I trust Georgia's bringing up has taught her that.”

Aunt Conyngham deemed it right and fitting to love one's husband,—the Bible bade a woman do so; for, like many people, she could always find texts in that mysterious volume to support her views upon any and every subject. But for a girl to fall in love in advance of marriage she considered positively indelicate; to refuse an alliance for lack of it, madness, to say the least. It was her creed that if a woman made a good match—she did not regard wealth and position enough by themselves; the man must be personally worthy—then affection grew after the union,—came naturally, as children did, and if a woman was not happy the fault must be her own.

She had been attached to her husband in a decorous fashion,—had enjoyed her beauty and social success,—but no man had ever caused her so much as the quickening of a pulse. Even the exciting happiness of maternity had been denied her, but, unlike most women, she had never regretted the lack. Her existence had been smooth as a well-kept lawn; no weeds of fancy, no brambles of caprice allowed there; everything was kept flat under the iron roller of settled opinion, and the monotonous expanse appeared to her the perfection of a human life.

Rumor had hinted that her husband used to find compensation elsewhere for the chilly atmosphere of his home,—sought gardens where the plants were not so carefully trained, and where the tendrils of the vines occasionally strayed away from the sticks of routine to which destiny had tied them. But in outward seeming he was all his wife could desire, and it is doubtful whether, if she had known rumor was correct, she would have been deeply hurt or shocked, so long as appearances were kept up.

She believed firmly that Providence—like many Christians, she put everything on the shoulders of Providence—had made one rule for men and another for women. She regarded

the foibles, what a few people in the world call sins, of young men as unavoidable. They must run a certain career of wildness,—it was a mark of aristocratic birth so to do,—must have mistresses and incur debts: so long as they only went far enough to gain an interesting reputation, she could see nothing in their conduct which demanded reprehension.

She proceeded to enlarge upon her favorite theme,—woman's duty where marriage was concerned; but Maurice would not be serious, so she dropped gracefully down to his level, and said,—

“You only laugh at me, and I want advice. You have been with Georgia now for several weeks, and can tell me what it is best to do.”

“Do nothing,” returned Maurice. “The weather is lovely; stop here quietly for ten days or a fortnight, and let Caruthers stop too. He could not have so good a chance elsewhere. He can see her constantly.”

“If she will let him stay.”

“She will; I can help you there. Now, be a good aunt, and don't fidget. You know, after all, fate must settle matters.”

“Don't use such a heathenish word!” cried she, thinking herself shocked thereat, though in reality she was irritated because she could not control that stern arbiter. She could not control Maurice either, and perceiving that, for some reason, or more probably caprice, he meant to keep Georgia still in the country, there was nothing for her but to remain also, so she expressed her readiness.

“Then that is decided,” said Maurice. “Now about the business. I shall not understand, but I am quite ready to do whatever you like; and, by the way, Georgia owns a share in those houses, so the sale will put a few thousand dollars in her pocket.”

Mrs. Conyngham entered into explanations with equal clearness and amiability, and the interview proceeded in the most satisfactory manner.

In the mean time, Georgia and Mr. Caruthers had walked through the town, and found their way to the waterfall. In the beginning, Georgia felt as much troubled as she had when left alone with her aunt, but, to her astonishment and relief, Mr. Caruthers maintained a reticence upon certain subjects

which seemed modelled on her relative's behavior. He acted as any intimate male friend might have done,—talked agreeably, and, having expended a reasonable amount of admiration upon the cascade and the scenery in general, he spoke of his own plans, and, without absolutely asking it, showed a desire to hear her opinion, but not in the least as if she could have any personal interest in his decisions.

It was only when they were close to the hotel again that he said,—

"I hope you were not sorry to see me, Miss Grosvenor? I had a few idle days, and I really could not refuse your aunt's request to accompany her. She seemed to dread the jaunt with nobody but her maid, as much as if it had been a journey across the Rocky Mountains."

"Indeed, it was very kind of you," Georgia answered. "Aunt Conyngham has a horror of travelling alone. I only hope you will not be bored by stopping here a day or two."

"Not likely," he said, with a smile; then he added, "I am very fond of the country and mountain-scenery, though I am a fusty, dusty man of law."

The commencement of his sentence, and his smile, had fluttered Georgia anew, but its close enabled her to answer gayly, and rally him upon his choice of adjectives.

"You have not said you were glad to see me," he observed, as they reached the hotel veranda.

"One is always glad to see one's friends," she replied, "and you and I are old and good friends."

In her heart she was not glad, but she hoped that her words might give him a warning of what he had to expect if he began to speak of any change in those friendly relations. He gave no sign of having understood, however.

Just then Mrs. Conyngham and Maurice came through the hall.

"Here you are," said the latter: "I was going to look for you. Caruthers, I have persuaded my aunt to stop ten days; of course you can't desert her."

"Oh!" exclaimed Georgia, frightened at the idea of being kept longer within Bourke's reach: "why, I thought we were going back at once."

"Nonsense!" said Maurice. "It's all settled. Don't make difficulties, Miss Puss! You'll stop, Caruthers?"

That gentleman glanced at Miss Grosvenor before replying. If she must remain, his presence would be a safeguard ; and yet, if she urged him to stay, it would seem an encouragement. Maurice helped her out of her dilemma.

"We will just be lazy and idle together, and forget there is a single serious consideration in the world," he said. "The first person who is guilty of having a thought shall be fined heavily."

"Oh, then we may have a pleasant week," said Georgia, and now she smiled at Mr. Caruthers.

"And if you all agree to let me stop, I shall be delighted," added that gentleman.

"Of course you must," Mrs. Conyngham said : "I can't be left cavalierless in these wilds ! I wanted Georgia to come here, but Maurice always will have his own way. I suppose the truth is, he thinks he can't visit that pretty Miss French quite so freely if his sister is gone."

"Oh, feminine Daniel !" cried her nephew, who had explained to his aunt that, if she insisted on Georgia's company, that young lady would at once turn rusty from a fear that the insistence arose out of a desire to afford Caruthers better opportunities of seeing her alone.

After a little more conversation, Georgia and Maurice took their departure.

"Well ?" Mr. Caruthers asked, turning towards Mrs. Conyngham, after watching the carriage till it disappeared.

"Patience !" she answered. "I know nothing yet ; but at least you will admit that my bringing you here was a good move."

"I hope so," he said ; "yes, I think so."

Mrs. Conyngham was a very charming companion, and they passed a pleasant day,—among other things, going to visit some acquaintances who had arrived at one of the hotels on the preceding night and meant also to linger for a little in the beautiful region.

The brother and sister came back at the appointed hour, accompanied by Phillis and Bourke, but the party drove over. Georgia had no mind to expose herself to a horseback ride with Denis, so she declared that she had promised her aunt to spend the evening, and it would be out of the question for her and Phillis to sit so long in their habits.

Denis behaved with great discretion : Aunt Conyngham became satisfied that her first suspicion must have been an error. The young man had not fallen in love with Georgia ! No doubt he would end by marrying Phillis French. That would dispose of them both. And, thinking this, Aunt Conyngham was prepared to be very amiable to the pair, and enjoyed Phillis's witty sallies, and appreciated her loveliness, as she might not have been able to do had her convictions taken another turn.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE next day proved as beautiful as ever an American autumn could produce, and the expedition which Bourke had planned was a complete success.

Mrs. Conyngham's acquaintances, the Thirstanes and their friends, had come into the hotel on the previous evening, and been asked to join the party, but, as their number made an addition of eight, Mrs. Conyngham thoughtfully vetoed Bourke's idea of asking them to dine. They would all go to his house on their return, and partake of a high tea in his garden, always the most enjoyable of meals, she declared, and the feminine portion of her listeners agreed with her. Maurice's information concerning his host's claret consoled the men for dispensing with a regular dinner.

Most of the young people went on horseback, but Georgia had offered her steed to the eldest Miss Thirstane, and placed herself decorously in the carriage with the mother, when the party reached the Nest. Mr. Caruthers was driving Aunt Conyngham in a pony phaeton, and that lady would have liked to give Georgia over to his care, but Miss Grosvenor artfully circumvented the plan. Just as they were ready to start, up came Denis and begged for a seat which was vacant : he had given his horse to one of the men. Georgia felt half vexed, half amused at this new and unexpected display of strategic ability on his part, but he did not appear to notice, and devoted himself to the elder ladies, who, having already learned that he belonged to "*The Bourkes*," were prepared to find him charming.

Everybody was delighted with Phillis, and, as Aunt Conyngham had spoken of her as Georgia's friend, the Thirstane party took it for granted that Miss Grosvenor was visiting her, and so did not occupy themselves about her social status, though had the mischievous girl been aware of their error she would undoubtedly have insisted upon her profession of boarding-house keeper, with a cheerful assurance calculated to make Aunt Conyngham's blood run cold.

Maurice devoted himself to her with an open assiduity which ought, according to novel-writers, to have roused a rancorous hate in the hearts of the other young ladies, but the Thirstane girls and their companions knew that Maurice Peyton was as far beyond the reach of their spells as an inhabitant of another planet, so they wisely contented themselves with the attentions of the remaining gentlemen, and, contrary to the laws laid down in romances, quite fell in love with the sparkling creature, and envied Georgia her friendship much more than they envied Phillis her power with Maurice.

"Do you know what I overheard Mrs. Thirstane say about me?" Peyton asked Phillis.

"Something unpleasant, I hope, since you were shabby enough to listen," retorted she.

"I didn't listen: I only heard."

"The distinction is worthy of you. Well, what did she say?"

"'Maurice Peyton, I really believe, is caught at last.' You needn't fly out at me, you know. I am only repeating what she said."

"I am sure I don't know why I should."

"Oh, I had not finished. 'That bewitching Miss French has captured him.' What do you say to that?"

"I am much obliged to her for the pretty adjective," replied Phillis, "but you can tell her the capture, if it existed, would have been as involuntary as getting a burr attached to my gown."

"Well, I owe you thanks, certainly!" cried he. "Upon my word, I do think you are the most provoking girl I ever knew."

"I always like to merit superlatives."

"You merit—I mean, if I were not a fool I should go away to-night and never speak to you again."

"Fancy me pining in a green and yellow melancholy ! Come now, either show yourself agreeable, or let some other man take your place," she said. "Look back : isn't that lovely ?"

"Yes," he answered, but with his eyes fastened on her.

They had wound for several miles up through a narrow mountain-gorge overhung by great masses of rocks, crowned with vines and dwarfed pine-trees. Now they emerged on a broad plateau, well wooded, from whence there was a magnificent panorama for miles and miles over the sweep of the two valleys shut in among the lofty peaks, which were purple and gold with the haze of the late afternoon.

Peyton helped Phillis to dismount, and tied their horses to a tree. The rest of the equestrians rode up, and presently the carriages gained the summit. Everybody alighted and strolled about, admiring the view. There was plenty of gay talk and laughter, and after a while the stone jugs of claret cup and lemonade, which Bourke had provided, were taken out of the ice-cold brook and distributed along with delicious cakes of Mistress Tabitha's manufacture.

Just as Mr. Caruthers perceived a favorable moment for placing himself beside Miss Grosvenor, who had hitherto been monopolized by some of the cavaliers belonging to the Thirstane party, the unfortunate gentleman was taken possession of by Phillis French, and so lost the chance he had eagerly awaited. Few of his sex would have considered themselves objects for commiseration, but Herbert Caruthers was one of those rare men who could only have eyes for one woman, and Miss French's witcheries were worse than wasted. Her detaining him laid in his mind the foundation of a dislike certain to grow rapidly, for he was a person who seldom changed his first impressions.

He thought her witty conversation fast, her manners coquetish ; even her piquant loveliness did not appeal to him ; and wicked Phillis, with her usual clear-sightedness, perceived the effect she was producing, and somewhat exaggerated her ordinary style, not caring in the least what he thought about her, so long as she could keep him aloof from Georgia, who at all events would be grateful, she knew very well.

Maurice Peyton watched her manœuvres, and, understanding their motive, hugely admired them, though under other circumstances jealousy would have prevented his so doing. He

had ceased to think or wonder how it had come about : the fact was patent to his own mind that he really loved this changeable, inexplicable creature, and, though his somewhat discursive past had brought him sensations enough in the way of passion and temporary caprices, he had never been in love till now.

He knew that he should have great difficulty in persuading Phillis of the depth and lasting nature of his feelings, but life had never yet brought him a disappointment, so he could not contemplate the possibility of anything in the world being refused upon which he had set his heart.

They waited to see the sunset colors brighten the hills, then set out on their return, in order to descend the mountain-road before twilight gathered.

"Aren't you ashamed to go stealing my sister's young man?" Maurice asked, as he helped Phillis to mount.

"And he enjoyed it so!" rejoined she, with one of her ringing laughs: "it was delightful to watch his face as he tried to hide his disgust under a ghastly smile. I have done for myself: if ever Georgia becomes Mrs. Caruthers, I shall not be allowed within her reach."

"It is all your own fault; serves you right too, for meddling," said Maurice, gazing at her with eyes so full of passionate admiration that Phillis proceeded to inflict punishment.

Before he could untie his horse she had ridden away with one of the other gentlemen, and he had to content himself with Miss Thirstane's society until they reached the den, and so might have been able to appreciate poor Mr. Caruthers's disappointment, only that he was too busy thinking of his own.

Phillis had sent Ninny to assist Mistress Tabitha; and the united genius of the pair had concocted a repast which would have tempted an anchorite and satisfied the palate of the most fastidious gourmand. The old house looked as picturesque as possible; the table laid in the garden, and lighted by lamps hung among the trees, produced a very pretty effect; and, to Georgia's astonishment, Bourke seemed quite in his element playing host to a large party. For the first time it struck her that, under good management, not only comfort, but a certain degree of luxury, could be attained

without great wealth : for Bourke's entertainment could not have been a more complete success in a villa at Twickenham or Newport.

Mr. Caruthers had succeeded in getting next her, and she prepared to be agreeable ; but unfortunately, soon after they were seated, she called upon him to admire Phillis, who was the centre of attraction to all the new men, young and elderly, and as much at ease in her rôle as if she had passed a season in Vanity Fair, only with a certain originality which she would not then have possessed, and which proved one of her greatest charms in masculine eyes, even though it might afford feminine judges a peg whereon to hang a little adverse criticism.

But Mr. Caruthers, with the memory of his recent wrongs prominent in his mind, could not admire Phillis French ; and, having no idea of the strength of Georgia's affection for her, he allowed this to be seen, and, what was worse, pronounced certain censures, which only displeased Miss Grosvenor the more because mingled with compliments to herself at Phillis's expense.

"The man is a good deal changed," thought ungrateful Georgia. "He is getting stiff,—even a little sententious; and, dear me! he certainly has grown old this summer."

She gave him a brief lecture on the folly of forming hasty judgments,—to him, who prided himself on his coolness and deliberation ! She added that she liked Miss French better than any other living woman, and meant to do so all her life, and to see a great deal of her too, and only wished she had the ability successfully to model her own manners upon those of her friend. Of course the reproof caused Mr. Caruthers to regard Phillis with increased disfavor. He felt hurt, too, that Georgia should treat his opinion so cavalierly ; and altogether the supper did not prove half so pleasant as he expected when he sat down at table.

Georgia had meant that the carriage should deposit Phillis and her at home ; but Bourke prevented this by indicating another route for the party's return, which would shorten the distance ; and, as most of the ladies were tired, his advice was accepted.

Georgia could not avoid walking back with Bourke beside her ; but she hoped at least to keep Phillis and her brother

near, and did her best to render the conversation general. She succeeded in her design until they reached the brow of the hill; then Phillis and Maurice laid wagers as to which of them would first get to the foot; and in spite of Georgia's remonstrances, couched under a fear that Phillis would fatigue herself, they set off, laughing like a couple of children just let loose from school.

They had chosen the high-road because too dark to take the path through the wood; so there was a long walk before them, and Georgia knew that, ten to one, the vexatious pair would not come within earshot again.

"So foolish of Phillis!" she said; "and she makes Maurice behave as much like a child as herself."

"Oh, the run won't hurt her," Bourke answered, with a cheerfulness which exasperated his listener, because it showed that he regarded the escapade as a special interposition in his favor. "P. French is as strong as one of our little mountain-ponies."

"She will overtask her strength some day," Georgia said; "she is never quiet."

"All' our new people seemed charmed with her," Bourke observed.

"As if anybody could be anything else! I never saw a creature so bewitching or so tantalizing," cried Georgia, ready to dwell upon Phillis French's perfections to an unlimited extent.

Just now a selfish motive mingled with her enthusiasm for her friend: she was glad to snatch at any subject which would keep the *tête-à-tête* on safe ground.

Bourke assented; then he asked,—

"So my farmer's entertainment was a tolerable success?"

"As I told you, they were all delighted."

"I was a little nervous at first," he said, laughing; "I was afraid you would think me awkward."

"Nonsense!" said Georgia,—then added, "I beg your pardon. I believe Phil and Maurice are infecting me with their careless ways."

"I don't think you need feel it necessary to be ceremonious with me," he answered. "I hope at least we have got beyond the frozen regions of mere acquaintance."

His voice was grave enough now, and Georgia did not speak.

"Have we not?" he persisted.

"A long while since," she replied.

Somehow this man irresistibly impelled her to tell the exact truth, even against her will.

"And a great way beyond, since I have told you that I loved you, and you have admitted that you care a little for me," he said, in the low, soft tone his voice took in moments of deep feeling.

Georgia withdrew her hand from his arm.

"What is that for?" he inquired.

"Because—because you are ungenerous," she said, somewhat unsteadily. "You promised me not to talk in that way again."

"Oh, Georgia Grosvenor!"

"Well, I asked you not, and I took it for granted that you promised."

"Hardly, I should think. Our conversation ended very abruptly."

"But there was nothing more to say," she interrupted.

"You must not call me ungenerous because I take any opportunity I can get," he went on, regardless of her sentence.

"You see I have my own battle to fight, and you would be the first to despise me if I did not fight with all my strength."

"There must be some object in doing so to make fighting meritorious. There is none here," she said, firmly.

"Please take my arm again; the hill is very steep," he said. "If you were to hit your foot against a rolling stone you might fall."

She was going to refuse,—to say that it was light enough for her to see; but just then she fulfilled his warning and stumbled, so could not object when he placed her hand on his arm.

"No object!" he continued. "I am fighting for my happiness."

"What you mean would not be for your happiness," she answered.

"I don't think I understand."

"Then I must make you," she replied, but animated by a sort of desperation rather than courage.

"You have been thinking it all over, then," he said. "I hoped you would. I am so glad you have!"

"Of course I have thought. Could I help it, after—after—"

"After I had told you I loved you,—after you had admitted that you cared," he said.

"I don't know what I admitted; you frightened me. It is not fair to remind me; I did not mean to say it."

"Oh, Georgia, who is ungenerous now?"

"Yes, I am,—worse than that,—cowardly! This is what I must say, then. Consider the admission I made unsaid; it can never have any sequence any more than if it had possessed no meaning. You understand?"

"That you were mistaken?"

"Oh, how can you torment me? Then I must speak out—"

"Yes; nothing must be left untold."

"The idea of my marrying you would be as insane as for me to jump into the lake down yonder. There! I hope that is clear enough!" she cried, almost fiercely, while a hot pain shot through her heart as she uttered the words.

"It is not in the least clear," he said. "It would be if you did not care for me; but since you do—"

"What good is there in my caring?"

"If it makes you and me happy."

"It could only make us both unhappy: I have told you so," she said. "Wait; let me finish. Perhaps it will sound hard, but I am hard—and worldly—to the very core. I have told you that too."

"Oh, yes; you have told me that!"

"And it is true. So, now, what could you offer me—what would you do with me or for me—if—if—"

"If you consented to be my wife?"

"Would you expect me to live in your old farm-house, buried alive, feeding the chickens, superintending the garden? You must see how absurd that idea is; you know how I have been brought up. You know my expensive habits,—my craving for excitement; yes, more than that, you know that I am ambitious. I want a high place in the world—influence, position—I—oh, you know all these things? Don't make me feel how hard I am by forcing me to hear myself say them."

"Then you admit there are women who could give up all *these advantages* for love?" he asked.

"Yes, and I envy them; but, mind you, all the same I think they are mad!" she exclaimed.

"Wait a moment; let us look at your first speech a little."

"It's no good trying to tear it to pieces."

Again he went on, regardless of her interruption:

"That high place in the world which you want,—do you think it would be very soft, very sunny, shared with a husband whom you did not love?"

"I never have believed in love,—at least for myself."

"But now, Georgia—now!"

She did not speak, but he felt her hand tremble on his arm.

"With any feeling in your heart for one man, could you accept that position you speak of from another?"

"No; but I told you I did not mean to go on caring."

"You can't help it. Hearts won't go out and come back at bidding."

"I don't believe I have much heart. You can see my regard for you cannot be very deep, since I am not prepared to attempt any sacrifice—not even the slightest—for your sake."

He stopped short and confronted her in the dim uncertain light.

"Georgia," he said, "I would not marry you while you had any feeling that you had made a sacrifice."

"Certainly the life you could offer me would involve a very, very great one!"

"That is because the way I look at it is new to you. If your regard grows, your views will change."

"Never enough to persuade me that a life of obscurity is worth living!" she said, passionately, fighting against something in her own breast all the while. "If you talked to me of making a career for yourself,—a fortune,—winning fame and honors,—if you promised those things in the future, it would be different."

"I have my career," he answered: "circumstances might widen, but nothing could alter it."

"Oh, I have heard over and over all your philanthropic plans,—your general brotherhood ideas," she said, impatiently, though it seemed to her that she was impatient with herself, not him. "They are fine—noble—but utterly impossible. Instead of leading to fortune and position, they will lead to wasting money and becoming a jest,—a failure."

"If I were to have millions left me to-morrow, I should only begin to carry out my ideas on a larger scale," he said, calmly.

"Then why think of—of liking a woman who can no more sympathize with such opinions than a marble statue could?" demanded she.

"I should not," he answered. "But in your soul you do sympathize with them; you do know them worth living for,—yes, dying for, if that became necessary!"

"I assure you, the human being never existed so little capable of any approach to heroism as I," she said.

"And I assure you that you are capable of a great deal. You don't know yourself. You have lived a false life,—been nurtured on false principles; you have despised and hated them,—girded against the emptiness of existence,—tried to believe you had no heart! My dear child, the man, be it I or another, who teaches you that you have one, will show you too that you are capable of accepting any existence, great or lowly, in which that heart can live and expand freely, which can offer the only personal good worth possessing,—happiness."

"I never knew a happy person. I don't suppose I have a right to expect an exception in my favor."

"Ah," he said, "now it is not your real self who is talking: it is the Miss Grosvenor that your little society world knows."

"That is my real self; at least it must grow to be," she cried.

He waited an instant; then he asked,—

"Don't you feel ashamed?"

"Yes," she replied, with a sob; but she hardened her voice, and added, "It is true, though. There! you can see what I am. Be satisfied: go your way and let me go mine. You can at least have the comfort of despising me; and that will help you to forget."

"I believe if ever man and woman met whose way was meant to be the same, you and I are the two," he said.

"You drive me quite frantic!" cried she. "What is the use of such talk? Let us be friends. Be sorry for my vacuity if you like, but don't try to think me a grand character, or able to become one."

At this moment, to Georgia's intense relief, Maurice's voice rang through the still air, bidding them come on.

"I did not know we were so near the house," Bourke said. But he held her back when she would have hurried forward. "Have you told Mr. Caruthers that you cannot marry him?" he asked.

The utter unexpectedness of the question fairly took her breath away. She tried to be angry at his presumption in asking it, but it was useless; he kept her hand fast, and would so keep it, she knew, until she answered.

"No," she said, meekly.

"Then you ought," returned he: "it is not fair to leave him in suspense, now that you are clear in your own mind."

Georgia remained speechless. The oddest thing to her was that he dared speak like that, and that she could let him!

A few steps more brought them to the gate, where Phillis and Maurice were standing.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BESIDES the pleasure of his holiday, Mr. Caruthers had found a little occupation which helped to pass a portion of the hours when he could not have Georgia's society. Several years before, he had taken a tract of mountain-land in this region in payment of a bad debt, and he chanced to mention the fact to Bourke. It adjoined some coal-property wherein Denis held a small share, and which the new facilities offered by neighboring railways had decided the company to develop. Mr. Caruthers learned that the possession he had always regarded as valueless had become an object of interest to the company; and when Bourke informed the directors that the owner of the tract was stopping at Wachuset, they entered into negotiations for its purchase.

Denis saw a good deal of Mr. Caruthers: that gentleman displayed much interest in his projects, though he could not conceal his opinion that the young man was a visionary and would soon find himself obliged to renounce his schemes as a complete failure. But he admired Bourke's energy and enthusiasm, and was never weary of seeking his society. The peculiarity of the situation often caused Denis secretly to

smile, and he wondered if Mr. Caruthers's liking would survive the fact of discovering that he had a rival in his new acquaintance.

Ten days had elapsed, but Georgia Grosvenor still carried upon her conscience the burden of the confession she must make. Bourke's warning that it was unfair to keep her admirer in suspense, now she had come to a decision, troubled her with a sensation like guilt, though in reality there had been no opportunity for her to speak. Some plan of amusement was constantly on foot, and, frequently as she met Mr. Caruthers, they had slight chance to hold private conversations. There had been no further *tête-à-têtes* between Denis and herself; she had taken pains to avoid such,—with considerable difficulty, however, owing to his habit of appearing unceremoniously at the Nest.

Maurice was good and kind; but when Georgia tried in a roundabout fashion to impart something of her troubles and perplexities, he stopped her, saying,—

"My dear, if you asked for advice, I should not know what to answer. If you were to confide in me you would regret it. You know how proud and reticent you are; some time you might find it hard to forgive me."

She could not ask if he knew anything of what had passed between her and Bourke, much less try to discover if he suspected the most disturbing element in her thoughts. But his verdict was just: no human being could help. Maurice and Phillis, much as they loved her, were as powerless to aid as the merest acquaintance could have been. Phillis showed her sympathy in every way except words, and her companionship was a support and rest, though in all their evening talks no mention came up either of Mr. Caruthers or Bourke, save in an ordinary friendly fashion.

Georgia felt that she could not much longer go on as she was doing; the strain told upon her nerves, and brought back the sleeplessness, the loss of appetite, and the sensations of fatigue and causeless apprehension, which had been the troublesome features of her illness in the spring.

She began to tell herself she had treated Mr. Caruthers ungenerously; and, while recognizing the fear as an offspring of her morbid fancy, she could not avoid the pain it brought. Sometimes she sought to work herself into a passion against

Denis Bourke. It was cruel of him to unsettle her, when his reason must assure him that he had no right to ask her to share an existence like his. Oh! if she had never seen him, she should have married Mr. Caruthers,—been contented in a chilly fashion, filling up the years with aims and employments suited to a woman of her tastes. Then Denis's words would recur,—there was another woman in her, the real self, whose aspirations had been stifled in the artificial round of her education, but still possessed vitality enough to develop and grow strong, able to hold lofty aims, to do, to be, to suffer, if necessary, but to live.

Was this true? She seemed entirely ignorant of her own character; certainly her present self looked a stranger; a few months previous, an angel from heaven could not have induced her to believe she should ever feel what she felt now.

Her mind appeared a hopeless chaos; further than a resolve to speak frankly with Mr. Caruthers, and hasten beyond any possibility of contact with Denis Bourke, she could not reach. What she was to do with the coming years she could not tell. Oh, those years, how blank they showed!—how empty they would be when deprived of the brightness of her dream!

She was thinking of these matters one afternoon as she sat in the veranda with grandma and Phillis, the latter reading aloud. The old lady proved, as usual, an attentive listener, but Phillis, glancing now and then at Georgia, perceived that her thoughts were wandering,—knew, too, by the expression of her face, what dreary reflections troubled her.

Suddenly Peyton's merry laugh rang on the air; the three ladies looked up, simultaneously, and saw Maurice and Mr. Caruthers at the gate.

Georgia wondered how any mortal could laugh so gleefully, and the contrast of her brother's gayety with her own gloom so jarred upon her feelings that she said, almost fretfully,—

"One never can have an hour's quiet! I believe if one went to a desert island, some tiresome man would find means to intrude."

"Pretty sure, too, if you went, Georgia," replied Phillis, but her friend caught a quick glance of sympathy which afforded a certain comfort.

Miss French moved forward as the two gentlemen approached the steps. "You meant we should know you were coming,

Mr. Peyton!" she said. "If my opinion were asked, I should say it was very inelegant to laugh so heartily,—not at all my idea of the way in which 'a scion of aristocracy,' as Mrs. Thirstane calls you, 'ought to conduct himself.'"

"This is the person to blame," returned Maurice, pointing to his companion. "Don't oblige me to bear other people's sins."

"They would be a heavy load in addition to your own!" said Phillis. "Good-morning, Mr. Caruthers. You hear that slander? It shows you what you must expect when you choose evil society."

Phillis French and her heedless speeches were still as much under that gentleman's ban as when she first ran counter to his prejudices, though he could not help admitting her grace and charm, and carefully restrained any expression of his disapproval even from Mrs. Conyngham, lest in an unguarded moment she might tell Georgia thereof. Phillis was not deceived by his scrupulous courtesy; she knew he had never forgiven her. On her side, she could not patiently contemplate the possibility of her friend's marrying him, and delighted in doing and saying things to waken his silent contemplation.

"Good-morning, Miss French," he said, lifting his hat with what she called his Grandisonian manner. "I trust your grandmother is well."

"Come a little farther and she will speak for herself; so will Miss Grosvenor, whom you do not ask after. We are not dangerous, though we are ill regulated,—especially Georgia, who has, I fear, greatly contaminated my relative. But you did not answer my question as to whether you are convinced of the harm that arises from associating with a Tray of bad character!"

"I must be, since Miss French insists," he replied, politely, though he always grew a little stiff when subjected to her raillery.

He passed on, shook hands with grandma and Miss Grosvenor, and sat down between them. Phillis and Maurice stood leaning against the railing, and indulging in a few additional merrily sharp speeches of the kind Mr. Caruthers disapproved.

"You have not told us what you said to make Maurice laugh so loudly," Georgia observed, in a mood to find conversation an effort.

"He doesn't dare!" cried Peyton. "I was laughing at his misery."

"Indeed, I was at a loss to understand why my news amused you so much," said Mr. Caruthers, feeling, warmly as he liked Peyton, that the young man was very neglectful of the dignity of his elders.

"Then tell my sister, and see if she is amused," returned Maurice, exchanging a glance of satisfaction with Phillis.

"I think I am too indolent to-day to be amused at anything," said Georgia.

"But not too lazy to be vexed," rejoined Maurice, gayly.

Georgia saw her admirer looking at her with a certain expression of uneasiness, and said,—

"Mr. Caruthers leaves that fraternal duty to you, Maurice: he never says any but pleasant things."

Phillis leaned over the balustrade, ostensibly to gather up some vine-tendrils which had strayed out of bounds, in reality to have an opportunity to whisper to Peyton, as he bent forward to assist,—

"He will end by making G. G. as Grandisonian as himself. I foresee that we shall be obliged to bring his geometrical existence to a violent and premature close."

"Listen," Maurice whispered back. "You'll see Georgia in a wax presently."

Then the absurd pair smothered their laughter, pulled the vines into place, and stood watching.

"What news did you give that silly boy?" Georgia was asking.

"Oh—ah!" said Mr. Caruthers. "Miss Grosvenor, your aunt and I had quite a surprise this morning. Mrs. Mayford arrived, very unexpectedly to us both."

His voice and face were so deprecatory that Maurice laughed outright, and Phillis joined him, causing Mr. Caruthers to cast a somewhat irritated glance in their direction.

Georgia had received his tidings in silence; he turned towards her again, and added, with a haste very unlike his usual deliberate speech,—

"She had been visiting some friends in Wyoming Valley, and having heard from Mrs. Conyngham that she was here—"

"And you," broke in Peyton.

"She stopped to spend a few days," continued Mr. Ca-

ruthers, only noticing the interruption by a frown. "You may imagine what a surprise it was to us."

"A pleasant one, I am sure," said Georgia, coldly, as his sentence died away unfinished. "My aunt's dear friend and your cousin must of course have been very welcome to you both."

"Dear me!" cried Phillis, uncharitably eager to aid Maurice in persecuting the unhappy gentleman; "have you a cousin, Mr. Caruthers, and has she come to visit you? We must do all we can to make her stay agreeable."

"You are very good, Miss French," he replied. "Mrs. Mayford and I are not relatives, however: she is the widow of a second-cousin of mine."

"Oh, that is the same as a relation of your own," said Phillis, with what Mr. Caruthers considered flippancy.

"Even nearer sometimes,—eh, Caruthers?" added Maurice, and this speech the ill-used gentleman would have characterized as downright brutal, if he had spoken his thought.

"And a widow is always charming!" cried Phillis. "And she is a great friend of yourself and the aunt, Georgia? Oh, do tell me all about her!"

"I am not good at description, Phil," said Georgia: "you will have to defer your curiosity until you see her."

Mr. Caruthers took advantage of these words to give the rest of his news, his deprecatory tone and expression returning as he did so:

"Mrs. Conyngham and she propose driving over a little later. Mrs. Mayford is most anxious to see you, Miss Grosvenor."

"That is very amiable on her part," said Georgia, cruelly determined not to be softened by poor Mr. Caruthers's humility.

"Of course she is young and pretty: aren't widows always, Mr. Caruthers?" asked Phillis.

Grandma had been a silent but observant spectator: she saw that Georgia was annoyed, Mr. Caruthers troubled thereby, and Phillis and Peyton bent on worrying both, so she said,—

"My child, you must have tea ready: the ladies will be tired after their drive."

"Ah, dear madam, you are always kindness and thought-

fulness itself," said Mr. Caruthers, turning towards the old lady with the deference and gentleness he always showed her,—a consideration which formed his redeeming point in Phillis's eyes.

"Of course she is, Mr. Caruthers,—the result of my bringing up! Yes, yes, grandma, we will high tea them to the fullest extent of mine and Ninny's abilities! But you didn't answer my question, Georgia or Mr. Caruthers—who was it I asked? Is Mrs. Mayford young and pretty?"

"Rather pretty and rather young," said Georgia, smiling: she could never long resist Phillis's nonsense.

"I don't believe *rather young* is grammatical; now is it, Mr. Caruthers?" cried Phillis.

"It isn't founded on fact, either!" added Peyton.

"Why, Maurice, what a horrible speech!" expostulated Georgia.

"She's thirty-five, and we know it, though she always talks as if she was our contemporary," said Maurice. "She is rather pretty; she is deceitful, catty, and abuses you and me like pickpockets behind our backs! Caruthers knows it as well as we, and he knows there's no love lost between us, so why make a mystery of your sentiments?"

"Certainly, my dear fellow, you have spoken clearly enough," rejoined Mr. Caruthers, with a constrained smile. He had no objection to hearing his relative's widow abused, but he did not like its being done before Miss French.

"You mustn't try to prejudice us against the lady in advance, Mr. Peyton," said grandma, gently, out of care for Mr. Caruthers's feelings.

"Oh, discovering that she has discernment enough to appreciate Mr. Peyton at his just value, could not have that effect," observed Phillis, turning quickly against her former ally.

"Because you know my worth too well," said he.

"But I don't believe any human being could help loving Georgia," said Mrs. Davis, naïvely.

"Thanks, grandma!" said Georgia.

"Unless that human being were a widow rather pretty and rather young!" cried Phillis.

"I think Miss Grosvenor will admit that Maurice exaggerated somewhat," Mr. Caruthers remarked, looking at her so contritely that Georgia felt she could not be sufficiently un-

generous to punish him any further for what was no fault of his, especially as she knew well that Mrs. Mayford was as distasteful to him as to herself.

"Phillis knows he always does, Mr. Caruthers: she will receive his statement with due reservation," said Georgia, encouraging her unhappy devotee by a cordial smile.

"Indeed, G. G., I have always found Mr. Peyton a model of truth," cried Phillis, again going over to her ally.

"And if Georgia and Caruthers don't stop abusing me, I'll tell something else," said Maurice, with a mischievous glance at the gentleman, under which he visibly suffered.

But Georgia was too thoroughly a woman to let anybody tease an admirer of hers beyond certain limits, and now she came to Mr. Caruthers's rescue.

"Grandma, you have had no turn in the garden to-day," she said. "Suppose we go there and show Mr. Caruthers our dahlias? We will leave this tiresome pair to bore each other."

The old lady complied; Mr. Caruthers offered her his arm with alacrity, and led her down the steps.

"G. G. is beginning to pit herself against the widow," said Maurice, in a whisper, as his sister passed him in their wake.

"Oh! now I understand!" answered Phillis, in the same tone.

"You are the most ridiculous couple of spoiled children that I ever saw," said Georgia, aloud, laughing so pleasantly that Mr. Caruthers glanced back with an increased air of relief. It lightened his spirits wonderfully to find that she did not mean to bear heavily upon him for the misfortune of Mrs. Mayford's arrival.

When the three were out of hearing, Phillis said,—

"I see! I see! That widow has made a dead set at poor Mr. Caruthers, and hates Georgia because she has stolen him."

"Precisely!" said Maurice. "It's lucky she doesn't know the real state of matters between them, else she'd poison Georgia as sure as fate. You ought to have seen his fright when he told me of her invasion! He pretended to have a message for Denis, but he only came to our house first, to get me to help break the news to G. G. of the intended visit! He let out that the widow wanted to make him stop and drive over, but he escaped by promising to see them home."

"And is she really a great friend of your aunt's?"

"She was a ward of Mr. Conyngham's, and used to live in their house: the aunt is attached to her from habit, and the widow knows how to flatter her very adroitly. Then she's sorry for her: old Mayford's relations managed to break the will, and she only got a very moderate share of the spoils, which was hard lines, as she married him for his money."

"Ugh! served her right!" said Phillis.

"She's as plausible and deceitful as Old Nick," he continued. "She will rush into an intimacy with you if she can: you'll hear a nice lot about me!"

"I shall be too busy gaining her confidence in regard to her plans on poor Mr. Caruthers to listen," said Phillis. "Now I must go and warn Ninny to prepare a feast. We will mollify her with hot biscuits, and soothe her with sweets, and she shall sit next her proposed victim at table. I foresee that I shall dote on the widow."

"Now, please, don't stop away an hour," pleaded Maurice, as she turned to go. "I want to tell you something."

"I will join you in the garden."

"No, no: I don't wish to hear Caruthers prose."

"But I do," said Phillis. "He is very nice, though he doesn't like me."

"Nonsense! But never mind him!"

"No more than I do you," she replied, and disappeared in-doors.

In the mean time the other three had entered the garden. Mr. Caruthers complimented the old lady's dahlia to her satisfaction, and showed a becoming interest in her cheerful talk.

"I will sit down now," she said, after a while, as they reached a rustic bench. "Georgia, my dear, perhaps Mr. Caruthers will help you pick some of our beauties to give your aunt. Choose a quantity of those splendid crimson ones,—Eastern Queens, Phillis calls them, though I fancy the name is her own invention."

"It is certainly very appropriate," said Mr. Caruthers.

He gratefully seized the opportunity for a little private conversation with Miss Grosvenor, and grandma sat looking after them as they walked away, thinking how pleasant it was to have the *society* of all those charming young people, for to

grandma even Mr. Caruthers had hardly lost claims to youth. The patience with which she had borne the trials of former years had borne blessed fruit; no cloud of doubt troubled her; whatever happened would be for the best, whether as regarded her darling Phillis or others. She could sit and smile at her own pretty fancies, listen to the songs of the late birds, enjoy the sunshine, her soul filled with serene quiet, and perhaps, though we who are restless with the possession of strength can hardly realize it, that boon granted to age is the highest blessing which reaches us in the whole round of human existence.

"What a picture the dear old lady makes!" Georgia said, glancing back at her as they paused by the dahlia-beds.

"Yes," Mr. Caruthers answered, a little absently, too full of the wish to acquire a certainty that he had not incurred Miss Grosvenor's displeasure, to bestow much thought on any other subject.

"I think we will have some of these Golden Marvels," Georgia observed, and he began to pick the blossoms she pointed out.

"I am so sorry for what has happened!" he said. "It would have been bad taste on my part to say much before strangers; still, I beg you to believe, Miss Grosvenor, that I would have saved you the annoyance of Mrs. Mayford's visit if I could; but I never dreamed of her coming here."

"You could have done nothing if you had known, Mr. Caruthers," Georgia replied. "And it certainly would be very unjust to blame you. Indeed, she will tease you more by the exactions of her friendship than she can me by her active dislike."

He sighed, remembering what he should have to endure, but only said,—

"She can hardly go so far as active dislike."

"Don't risk your character for sincerity by pretending to doubt it," returned Georgia, laughing. "She seldom takes any pains to hide her feelings towards me."

He could not deny this, and he knew, too, that in her girlish days Georgia had often suffered at the unscrupulous woman's hands by being misrepresented to her aunt, and annoyed in every possible manner, until old enough to teach *her enemy* that she had grown too strong for this line of

conduct to continue. Personally, too, he had strong reasons for detesting his relative's widow. Though too thorough a gentleman to breathe it to any human being, and hating to admit it even to his own thoughts, because it seemed vain and petty, the relict's pursuit had been so open, in spite of her usual wariness, that it was useless to try to shut his eyes to the fact of her having stern matrimonial intentions in regard to him, which failure had by no means caused her to relinquish.

"The truth is, she is envious of you," he said.

"Her reasons are as indifferent to me as her dislike itself," said Georgia. "We get on very well, now that she has learned it is not safe to pass certain limits. I suppose that speaks ill for my amiability; but then she is perfectly correct when she says I am not amiable."

"Oh, Miss Grosvenor!"

But Georgia did not want compliments which might pave the way to more serious subjects, for upon these there could be only one further discussion between them, at such time as she should find courage to tell him the truth. There was no opportunity now, Georgia reflected with a sensation of relief, even while her conscience pricked her for not having made it before.

"Look at those gorgeous purple flowers," she said. "Philis calls them the Ladies-in-Waiting: the white are Maids of Honor. There is no end to her pretty fancies."

"Miss French is undoubtedly very clever," he replied.

"The cleverest girl I ever knew, and the best!" cried Georgia, so vehemently that Mr. Caruthers deemed it wise not to hint at a single exception.

"She is fortunate in her friend," he said: "you do not praise by halves."

"I hope you know that when I am one I am sincere," she answered.

"Indeed I do," he said, so earnestly that she remembered her words had offered a dangerous opening, and hastened to add,—

"I think we must not commit any further depredation; and grandma enjoys your visits so much, it is not fair to deprive her any longer of your society."

Mr. Caruthers would gladly have lingered, and carried the

conversation on to personal subjects, but he was always afraid of worrying Georgia; though, had he known female nature better, he would have been aware that too scrupulous a delicacy in using opportunities to plead his own cause never yet helped a man with any woman.

"I am so glad you are not annoyed," he said. "I assure you, Mrs. Mayford seems in her most amiable mood."

"We must keep her amused; then she'll not tease us," Georgia answered, walking so determinedly forward that he was obliged to yield all hope of prolonging the *tête-à-tête*.

"It would be hard indeed if anything happened to mar the brightness of these days," he observed.

Alas! they must soon be marred for him, was Georgia's bitter reflection, and the trouble must come through her! Again a swift pang of remorse smote her, as sharp as if the necessity had arisen from her own deliberate fault.

"See what an unfair advantage I have taken of your permission, grandma," she said, as they reached the bench. "I am quite ashamed."

"They will not be missed," the old lady replied. "You must make up two nose-gays."

Mr. Caruthers thought that few moments in his life had been so pleasant as this quiet half-hour, spent in watching Georgia's white fingers busy among the blossoms, listening to grandma's conversation, while the late afternoon sunshine cast its glow about, and a sense of peace seemed to pervade all exterior objects which found an echo in his breast, and Georgia herself gladly put by her recent troublesome reminders, and fastened her mind persistently upon the present.

Maurice was left so long to his solitude that he had time to smoke an entire cigar, while thinking that a chameleon could not be more changeable than Phillis French, though this very gift only kept him in a constant state of excitement, which grew in intensity as the days taught him the depth and sincerity of his feelings.

Mrs. Mayford likewise intruded herself upon his thoughts. He knew that his laughing assertion had been true; there would be no limit to her aspersions, and he could never tell Phillis the real grounds of the woman's animosity. In his very youthful days she had tried to soften the tedium of her married life by flirting with him, and his indifference had too

nearly approached scorn ever to gain forgiveness. He could only hope that Phillis's acuteness would lead her to think Mrs. Mayford's extreme bitterness must spring out of personal feeling, and so pay no heed to her mixture of falsehoods and garbled truths. Then, too, he comforted himself by the reflection that for a woman to abuse a man to one of her own sex, and relate stories of his wildness and concomitant vagaries, usually had the effect of prejudicing the listener in the culprit's favor.

Maurice at length so completely lost patience that, though aware it was ten to one Phillis would punish him for doing it, he started in search of her. He met her in the hall, and she said, in a complacent tone,—

"Now, haven't I made my arrangements quickly?"

"You have been gone an age."

"But when you see the result you will admit that the time was well spent. I shall win Mrs. Mayford's heart. I am sure she likes good things: catty women always do."

"I think it rather hard I should be sacrificed to her ostrich stomach," he said, complainingly, half in jest, half in earnest. "At all events, now I can have you for a few moments to myself, and—"

"There comes the carriage!" interrupted Phillis, with a malicious pretence of excited pleasure. "Oh, if they drive in and ruin the gravel, I shall hate them forever! Run and meet them, if you have a heart in your bosom, and say there is not room to turn; say anything! only go!"

He knew he must obey, and off he went, followed by her mocking laugh, and reached the gate as the carriage drew up. Mrs. Mayford received him with great affability, and he gratified her by a few adroit compliments. Grandina and her companion had joined Phillis before the three came up, and it was an exhilarating sight to watch the widow dart upon Georgia, crying,—

"Oh, you darling girl, how glad I am to see you! But you don't look so well as I expected; but then whatever style you adopt, pink or pale, is always becoming."

"Country air has certainly agreed with you, Mrs. Mayford," said Georgia, releasing herself from the warm embrace. "Now let me make you acquainted with my friend Mrs. Davis, and her grand-daughter, Miss French."

Mrs. Mayford was enthusiastic in her greetings, and, indeed, if an excessive affectation had not marred her manner, she would have been very agreeable when she desired to please. She paid the old lady and Phillis many neatly-turned compliments, and went into raptures over their home.

"I see you did not exaggerate in your description, cousin," she said to Mr. Caruthers.

She always would bestow that name upon him: it afforded an appearance of intimacy which she was not the woman to neglect, though it annoyed him sorely, especially in Georgia's presence, as Phillis's quick eyes discovered.

"Nobody ever accused Caruthers of that bad habit, I should think," said Maurice, looking towards Phillis to show that he shared her amusement at Mr. Caruthers's unconcealed dislike of the familiar title bestowed with such sweetness upon him.

"Nobody ever accused my cousin of any, you very wicked Maurice!" cried the widow, shaking her finger at him.

"Cousin" in two consecutive sentences! It really was too much for Mr. Caruthers's patience. He sat down by grandma, and began asking if she were tired, and left the others to talk among themselves for a few moments.

The widow devoted herself to Phillis, who studied her with interest, with her usual acuteness rapidly arriving at a clear estimate of her new acquaintance's character.

Georgia's description had portrayed her personal appearance with great exactness. She was rather pretty and rather young-looking. She was too thin, and the nose and chin were too sharp; the fair complexion had begun to grow slightly yellow, though as yet a faint *souçon* of rouge in her cheeks was enough to make a contrast of color which concealed the defect tolerably well; her eyes were good, and her smile very sweet, but insincere, and the small white teeth were a little too pointed,—they betrayed her relationship to the feline race. She had a soft, low voice, too, but in spite of her care in its modulation, there were certain tones which warned an acute observer that it could easily grow sharp and take in every note in the gamut of unpleasantness, from fretfulness to downright snarling.

"Catty is very shrewd," thought Phillis, "but the instincts will show. I am sure her coming will make sport."

Maurice noticed the two bunches of flowers, which Mr. Caruthers had deposited on a chair, and said,—

"Somebody has been robbing your garden, Miss French."

"Oh, Georgia is never to be trusted there," said Phillis, "and grandma is wickedly weak in regard to her thievish propensities."

"This time I am not the culprit," returned Georgia. "Mr. Caruthers picked the dahlias,—a delicate attention on his part towards Mrs. Mayford and my aunt."

"Oh, what beauties!" exclaimed Mrs. Mayford, rising to examine the bouquets. "Thanks, thanks, cousin!"

"I must not lay claim to undeserved merit," that gentleman replied: "the flowers were Mrs. Davis's thought."

"How good of you!" said the widow, going towards her with a bouquet in each hand. "Did you ever see anything so perfect, cousin?"

"Very pretty in point of color," he answered; "but I don't care for autumn flowers: they are always scentless."

He had no intention of making an ill-natured speech, but it seemed so applicable that Maurice could not repress a smile. Unfortunately, the lady turned just in time to catch it, and fully understood its meaning.

"The bunches are exactly alike, so we can't quarrel over them," she said.

"Do women need a reason in order to quarrel?" Maurice asked.

"Ah, you must not judge the sex by your victims in those very peculiar Continental cities; must he, Miss French?" she cried, gayly.

"Have his victims been numerous?" demanded Phillis, putting on a shocked and startled expression.

"Oh, I mustn't whisper secrets," laughed the widow. "Don't be frightened, Maurice; we'll not expose him: will we, Aunt Conyngham?"

She knew that the brother and sister disliked to hear her address their relative thus: so in their presence she often resorted to the title which it had been her habit to use in her girlish days.

"He's a very good boy, on the whole," said Mrs. Conyngham.

"Oh, that's doubtful praise. Mr. Peyton, I would rather be exposed than condemned by doubtful praise," cried Phillis.

"I am resigned either way," he answered, amused that the

widow, in her eagerness to be spiteful, should so quickly show her hand.

"Aren't we to have the pleasure of Denis Bourke's company, Mr. Peyton?" asked grandma. "Phillis, we must send for him."

"He is certain to stray along presently, Mrs. Davis," said Peyton. "I'll not have you think too much about him when I am here."

"Oh, isn't that the gentleman you spoke of, cousin?" asked Mrs. Mayford. "One of *the* Bourkes turned Socialist?"

"My dear madam," cried he, in horror, "I never dreamed of using such a word! Mr. Bourke has original but very admirable ideas in regard to social duties. I have seldom met a man who impressed me so favorably on short acquaintance."

"Oh, don't scold me. I didn't intend to say anything wrong, cousin. I don't even know what Socialist means; do you, Georgia?" she rejoined, with a girlish laugh.

"If it means anything that expresses Mr. Bourke's theories and practice, it must be very noble," said Georgia, quietly.

"I'm dying to see him," cried the widow. "And does he really live here and work his own farm, Miss French?"

"Oh, yes," Phillis replied: "he and I are both farmers."

"You! Oh, that is too delicious! But do you really amuse yourself by superintending your place?"

"Not exactly for amusement," said Phillis. "I do it to earn my living; but I like it."

"Oh, how nice! I wish I could earn money, and so get beyond being as poor as a church mouse," sighed Mrs. Mayford. "But where did you and Georgia get acquainted? I went South before she left town, and didn't know in what direction she went to visit this summer."

"Phillis and I made acquaintance here," said Georgia; "but we were friends at first sight, and mean to stay so."

"Georgia wanted a quiet nest, and I wanted a boarder," said Phillis.

"Oh, I didn't know—I beg pardon," faltered the widow, in pretended confusion, adding, in a reproachful tone, to Mrs. Conyngham, "You should have told me,—I am afraid I seemed rude, Miss French."

"What a funny idea!" laughed Phillis.

"I declare it is all positively Arcadian," cried Mrs. May-

ford, and hurried on to another subject, certain that at least she had vexed Georgia.

She wanted to see the garden ; Miss Grosvenor announced her intention of remaining with grandma, and Mr. Caruthers wanted to stop also ; but the widow would not let him off.

Before the party returned to the house Bourke appeared, and had a few moments alone with Georgia and grandma. Presently they all went in to tea, and Mrs. Mayford allowed herself no further lapses from amiability. She was charming to Denis, and rendered it evident that she had conceived an affection for Phillis as deep as it was sudden. She went away with the suspicion that she should be able to torment the brother and sister through this pair, and the idea put her in high spirits.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE next day Denis Bourke and Mr. Caruthers departed to fulfil an engagement they had made to visit a coal-mine, some fourteen miles off, among the hills, in the society of several directors of the company ; and late in the afternoon Georgia and Maurice drove over to see their aunt, having tried in vain to persuade Phillis to join them.

"It is rather hard on that unfortunate lady never to see you without having me thrust in as a third," said Phillis.

"Why, you scarcely ever go with us," returned Georgia.

"Possibly your aunt might have a different opinion."

"But she will only be too delighted," urged Maurice.

"Of course I am sure of that, Mr. Peyton," Phillis replied : "no creature could be anything else. Many people cry for my society, just as the advertisements say children do for Mrs. Winslow's soothing syrup. I'm as grateful to take as a cup of tea or any other beverage that is cheering but not inebriating."

"I think one would be obliged to leave out the negative," said Peyton. "But remember you have to return the dear Mayford's visit. Now you will go with us, will you not?"

"Yes, I will not: so don't waste time. The fair widow must try and support life without seeing me to-day. It will be an effort, I know; but it can't be helped. Give her my

admiring compliments, and present my respectful duties and devotions to your aunt."

They found that lady depressed in spirits by a neuralgic attack,—alone, too, as Mrs. Mayford had gone to dine with the Thirstanes: she never remained near anybody who was suffering, if she could help it. Mrs. Conyngham begged Georgia to stop over-night, and of course she could not refuse. Maurice remained, and dined with them in the aunt's apartment; but soon after eight o'clock he rose to depart.

"You must drive round by the Nest, and tell Phil I am not coming, else she will sit up for me," said Georgia.

"Of course," said Maurice.

"But that road is considerably longer," Mrs. Conyngham observed. "You can send your boy Joe over to tell Miss French."

"Yes, I can do so," Maurice answered, so dryly that Georgia smiled and Aunt Conyngham frowned.

"You are in a great hurry to run away," she said, in an injured tone. "I am sorry it bores you to spend an evening with your sister and myself."

"I should be sorry if it did," he replied; "but Miss French must be told that Georgia stops with you."

"Miss French is a most important and highly-considered person," said Aunt Conyngham, with a not quite agreeable laugh.

"Very important in my eyes," returned Maurice.

"And she certainly ought to be highly considered by all my friends," added Georgia. "Her goodness to me, her kindness and care during those first weeks when I was ill and miserable, were beyond all possibility of thanking her for."

"My dear children, please don't both attack me, as if I had been slandering the young lady," cried Aunt Conyngham, getting back her good humor. "I think her charming and very kind-hearted, and at least I am constant in my likings, if too old to be enthusiastic. That is better than Maurice's way of going into spasms of admiration over a person this week, and forgetting that person's existence the next."

"Oh, what a dreadful calumniator is this aunt of mine!" cried Maurice, laughing.

"It is perfectly true,—Georgia knows it,—at least where *young women* are concerned," persisted Mrs. Conyngham.

Maurice defended himself against the aspersion, in which Georgia joined, and a good deal of gay bantering ensued ; but when Peyton had taken leave of his relatives, and was driving towards the Nest, his conscience forced him to admit that the allegation in regard to his fickleness could have been supported by numerous proofs and examples.

But he knew this could never be the case in regard to Phillis French. Even in the early days of their acquaintance he could not easily have broken the spell she cast over him, and he recognized now that he was bound by a chain riveted fast in the very core of his heart.

He loved the girl ; the feeling was totally unlike the sentiment he had indulged towards any other of her sex ; he loved her, and he meant to marry her if she could ever be brought to grant him this happiness,—ever be brought to care enough for him ! But she had so completely humbled his vanity that he did not venture to think that as yet she had gone beyond friendly liking, and he frankly acknowledged himself not half worthy her regard ; but then no man was, or could be ; and he loved her !

He found Joe Grimshaw at the gate of Phillis's house, waiting to take the horse home, knowing from experience that Mr. Peyton would stop at the Nest.

"Has Mr. Bourke got back, Joe?" he asked.

"No, sir, and I don't believe he'll come now : there's been a thunder-storm up in the mountains."

"Why, Joe, where do you find any signs ? The moon is as bright as day !"

"'Tis here," said Joe ; "but jest you look at that heap o' clouds away off towards Blue Rock ; they're up in that quarter, and I'll bet my eye-teeth they've had a soaking afore now, unless they got to Hummins's tavern by eight o'clock."

"We will hope they did," said Maurice. "Don't sit up for me, Joe. Tell Patrick to leave the kitchen door open."

"All right, sir. Good-night," responded Joe, as he jumped into the carriage and drove off, grinning to himself. "He's that sweet on her, is Mr. Peyton," thought Joe, "that he's like a fly arter honey ; but what Miss Phillis thinks, a jury of judges couldn't tell, and if he ever does ketch her, he'll have to dance as hard for it as a wooden-legged man climbin' up a ladder."

Peyton walked towards the house by no means dissatisfied with Joe's information that he should not find Denis. To enjoy a monopoly of Phillis's society for the rest of the evening was a pleasure so great that he had no sympathy to waste on the misfortune of his friend whereby this consummation had become a possibility.

"It really is a proof of the truth of the old proverb about the ill wind," thought Maurice, laughing from sheer high spirits. Then he fell to marvelling in which of her numberless moods he should find Phillis French; but it did not much matter, she was sure to be charming in any case, only if she happened to be a little subdued and serious he would do his best to turn the mood in his own favor.

Then he hurried on up the path, eager to enter her presence. When he reached the porch, he found the out door closed, for a wonder, because the evenings were still so warm that it usually stood open till Phillis retired for the night. But he saw a light in the sitting-room; through the open window he could hear Mrs. Davis's voice; she and Phillis were there together, of course. However, it must be near the old lady's bedtime, and then he should have Phillis French all to himself.

He knocked, waited a moment, then tried the door; it was locked. He heard grandma say,—

"That is Denis or Mr. Peyton."

"And he means to enter, Grandma Davis, so you might as well have your inhospitable door opened," Maurice called, laughingly.

Grandma laughed back in answer. Peyton heard steps in the hall; very likely Phillis French coming herself to admit him. A key was turned, a bolt drawn back; Maurice said, gayly,—

"Bolts and bars are useless, Miss French! Aren't you ashamed to be proved cowardly? If it had been Georgia, now—"

The sentence remained unfinished; the door had opened. Maurice perceived that he stood face to face with Miss Raines, holding up a candle, by the light of which she peered eagerly at him.

"Land's sakes alive, so it is you, Mr. Peeton!" she exclaimed. "What between Molly Maguires and the news-

papers, I'm allers suspectin' depredators and burgleers, and I says to Miss Davis awhile ago, says I, 'That 'ere front door has got to be locked, for Ann Raines ain't a-going to let you risk bein' depredated and burgled while she's round the patch.'

"Quite right! I hope you are well, Miss Raines?"

"I'm so's to be about without boostin', I thank you," replied the spinster. "Air you pooty chirpy yourself? I see you a-riding' by my place yesterday, but I was up to my elbows in bread-dough, so I couldn't arsk you 'How dy!' But step right in—do; Miss Davis she'll be proper glad to see you."

In spite of her invitation, she kept her stand, talking volubly, and he began to grow impatient.

"I will go in now and see Mrs. Davis," he said, when she paused to take breath.

"Why, in course; step right along!" said the lath-and-plaster woman. "It's quite a treat, I'm sure! I says to Miss Phillis, 'You jist go; I'll sit with grandma and sleep here!' I'd jist happened up with some work I'd been a-doin' for her, when Miss Plummer's little boy come and said Mirandy was took so much wus 'twasn't no ways likely she'd do more'n last till mornin', and she's been that sufferin' a body can't help callin' it a marcy, though it's hard to lose yer children, anyhow; and Mirandy she's that fond o' Miss Phillis that nothin' else would satisfy her."

"Miss French is not at home?" broke in Maurice.

"And won't be till mornin'," said Miss Raines; "she'll watch with Mirandy, and if anybody can be a comfort Miss Phillis will; for whatever she undertakes she's a dabster at, and watchin' is jist second natur' to her, as you'd know if you'd had her by you, as I did when I was that bad with rheumatiz fever last year that I screeched like all possessed if anybody said boo to me."

Maurice managed to get past the old maid and entered the sitting-room, where he was received by grandma with her customary placid cheerfulness. Never in his life had Peyton felt so disappointed at what might be called a matter of slight moment: he had counted so confidently on finding Phillis that to lose the pleasure made it seem that he had lost some very important opportunity of helping on his cause.

But he sat down and remained until the old lady's bedtime arrived, Miss Raines bestowing her society upon them, and claiming a large share of the conversation. Indeed, she carried her complacency so far that when Peyton rose, saying, "I must not keep you up, Mrs. Davis," the spinster exclaimed, 'Oh, law! don't go, Mr. Peeton, ef you feel like settin' still! I never go to bed airy myself, and I want to heel off this stockin'. When I've set myself a stent, I do like to finish it, and I said to myself arter supper, 'Ann Raines,' says I, 'you'll heel that stockin' afore you sleep to-night,' and Ann she's got to do it."

But Peyton declined the amiable invitation, and took his leave. When he reached home, Patrick, who was just closing the house, informed him that Mr. Bourke had not returned. After the old man had retired, Maurice found himself too restless to sit down in solitude, and his feelings in regard to Denis's detention changed so completely that he experienced a slight sensation of injury because his friend had chosen this night of all others to go off on an excursion with Mr. Caruthers and be detained by a storm.

He walked down to the road, and stood looking out through the moonlight. The house to which Phillis had gone was about a mile beyond Bourke's farm. Peyton knew it very well, for he had several times stopped there with Phillis and Georgia, and the little suffering child had conceived a great admiration for his handsome face and winning manners.

He strolled along the highway, not telling himself he meant to proceed as far as the house with the romantic purpose of staring at it simply because Phillis French sat within, but he knew such was his intention, though he tried to indulge in a dignified surprise when a turn in the road brought the dwelling in sight, then laughed at his folly in attempting to deceive his own perceptions, pleased to find he had youthful freshness enough left to undertake so Romeo-like an expedition.

Peyton noticed a light burning in one of the lower rooms, and knew that Phillis must be there with her charge. He could not go back without trying to obtain a glimpse of her, though he had no mind to risk her displeasure by making his presence known. But the sick child had fallen asleep, and Phillis was standing at the window, left open by Miranda's desire, as the oppression on her chest rendered breathing difficult.

The noise Peyton's feet made among the scattered chips as he passed the wood-pile reached Phillis's ear. She recognized his step; her first thought was that when Georgia got home and learned her whereabouts she had insisted on Maurice's bringing her to share the night's vigil. She leaned over the sill; Maurice saw her, and quickly approached the casement: evidently he had come alone.

"How is your little patient, Miss Phillis?" he asked, in an undertone, hastily deciding that such inquiry would be the wisest preliminary observation he could offer.

"She is asleep," Phillis answered,—*"sleeping very quietly, too."*

"I hope I did not startle you," he added.

"No; I saw who it was just as I heard your step. I thought perhaps Georgia had persuaded you to bring her. I am glad she did not come: she is not strong enough for night watching."

"The aunt was not very well, and Georgia stopped with her," Maurice explained. He waited an instant, but as Phillis offered no remark whatever, he thought it best to try and give some plausible reason for his appearance. "I went to your house to tell you, and sat awhile with your grandmother. I had the pleasure of Miss Raines's society also."

"I am sure you enjoyed that," she said; but though she smiled and spoke playfully, Peyton perceived that she was in one of her gentlest moods, and told himself that, if he had reflected, he might have been certain such would be the case, considering the mission which had brought her thither. She looked very lovely, too, in the moonlight, as any pretty woman is sure to do, her great eyes unusually soft, and the delicacy of her complexion heightened by the silvery radiance.

"When I reached home I found Denis had not come," he continued, "and I felt so restless and solitary that I decided to take a stroll: it was too early to think of going to bed."

"It will not be too early by the time you get back," she said, smiling again: "it must be eleven."

"But please let me stay a minute: you have nothing to do while the little girl is asleep. Is she very bad?"

"She does not suffer much, but she is near the end."

"Dying? Poor little thing!"

"Happy little thing, you mean," returned Phillis. "Think

what life would be to her here; think what it has been; and then fancy her waking to-morrow morning in the sunlight up yonder,—no more pain to bear, no more privation. I am sorry for the mother, but I cannot help being glad for the child."

"Ah, yes, of course! But what will the poor woman do without her?"

"She had a letter only to-day from a relative offering to take the oldest boy: it has made little Miranda so happy."

"And you can tell her, too," said Maurice, "that before I go away I will do whatever you decide will help them most."

"There's a mortgage on the place; poor Plummer died before he had finished paying for it," said Phillis. "A couple of hundred dollars would clear it, and then she could have the use of the land: now it has to be let in order to pay the interest."

"Then I will arrange that."

"It will be right to do it," was all she said, but he got a glance from her eyes which he felt would have been reward enough for giving thousands, instead of the sum she had named.

"Before I go away," he repeated: "it seems so strange to think of doing so. Miss French, shall you miss—I mean, at least, you will miss Georgia a little."

"I shall miss you both very much," she answered, as frankly as if he had been a relative. "As for losing Georgia—well, that is a necessity which I do not even allow myself to contemplate; time enough to think of it when the evil hour comes."

"And I am to count only as Georgia's brother!"

"Enough to satisfy a king," said she, laughing, but added, "I can't joke to-night."

"Heaven knows I don't want to joke!" he exclaimed, and his voice sounded all the more earnest from the necessity of keeping it subdued. "Won't you ever believe that I can be serious, Miss French?"

"Oh, I dare say you might on occasion," she replied, turning her head to look back into the room, as if she fancied she heard the child stir.

"I didn't dare hope I should be able to speak to you," said he, "but I was determined to have a glimpse of you."

"I am rather pleased you happened to stray along; somehow the complete stillness oppressed me," she answered, but her voice was too composed for him to make any specially personal application of her words. "Hear that owl," she continued; "it sounds like a tiny silver bell. And there is a whippoorwill: isn't it a pretty note. You don't have whippoorwills in Europe, Mr. Peyton?"

"I beg your pardon? I believe I was thinking of something else."

"Oh, I only attempted a little display of my ornithological knowledge."

"Now I know what you said. No; Europe cannot boast that sad-voiced bird. Do you never think you would like to go there?"

"In order to get rid of the whippoorwills?" she asked.

"Ah, I thought you said you were not in a mood for jesting."

"You see habit is strong. I suppose I should joke on my way to the stake," she said, and an odd, rather troubled expression flitted over her face.

She began asking questions about foreign lands, and Maurice managed very adroitly to render the conversation personal, and tell her of hopes and aims which he cherished, for he had an idea that she regarded him as an idler, and knew that he must remove this impression if he expected to gain her full esteem.

She listened, and her remarks showed that she was interested, but he did not venture to add a word which approached tenderness or love-making, though he restrained himself with difficulty, and a wild hope sprang up in his breast that Phillis was not wholly indifferent or incredulous of her power over him.

They had stood there for a full half-hour, and his talk was growing more and more earnest, when suddenly they heard the sick girl cough.

"Good-by, now," Phillis said: "she is awake."

"But it is not late; she will fall asleep again," he pleaded.

"Miss Phillis!" the sufferer called.

"Yes, dear," Phillis answered, hurrying towards the bed.

Maurice stood still and watched her; she moved so noiselessly, lifted the child on her pillows so deftly, spoke with such infinite tenderness, that it seemed to Maurice impossible for any other woman to be so marvellously sweet and gentle.

"I heard Mr. Peyton's voice," Miranda said, after she had drunk the cool beverage which her nurse held to her lips.

"Yes; he came to inquire how you were."

"He hasn't gone: I can see him by the window. Ask him to come in, Miss Phillis," said Miranda.

Phillis hesitated a little; before she could reply, Maurice swung himself lightly over the sill.

"Here I am, Miranda," he said.

"I'm so glad!" she answered, a glow of pleasure lighting her pale, emaciated features. "Come and sit down. I didn't think I should see you again; I'm dying, you know."

"No, no, dear child!" was all he could say, as he seated himself by the side of the bed and took her hand.

"Oh, yes, I am," she replied, in a low, thankful voice. "I couldn't get strong again, so it's such a comfort to go; poor mother's got enough on her hands without having me to work for. And, oh,—did Miss Phillis tell you?—her cousin is going to take Bob."

Phillis was standing by the head of the couch; she leaned over the child and whispered what Maurice had promised to do.

Miranda turned her face towards him with a smile so heavenly that one might have fancied the light from a higher sphere already illuminated her countenance.

"Let me kiss you!" she said. "That was all I wanted.—Oh, Miss Phillis, doesn't God know just how to manage everything for us!"

Phillis pressed her lips on the child's forehead in silence. Presently Miranda spoke again.

"I can't tell; there ain't any words; oh, I'm so thankful! Just sing one verse, Miss Phillis,—my hymn, you know."

And Phillis sang, in a soft undertone, a verse from that sweetest of church melodies, "Nearer, my God, to thee,"—sang with such heavenly sweetness that Peyton felt his eyelids grow moist.

"You are not tiring yourself, little one?" Phillis asked, as she finished.

"No, no; it rests me. I haven't any pain at all now; I'm so comfortable. Mr. Peyton, if I'm here to-morrow, you'll bring Miss Georgia to see me, won't you?"

"Certainly I will," he answered.

"I was dreaming about you and Miss Phillis. I expect I heard your voices in my sleep," continued the child, smiling at Maurice again, and softly patting the hand Phillis had laid on her pillow.

"What were you dreaming?" Peyton asked.

"I don't know: you were in such a beautiful place! Somehow I seemed so near, and yet such a way off; and I called out that I was glad you were so happy. Then you both looked up and smiled. Wasn't it a nice dream?"

"Yes," Peyton said, almost in a whisper.

"I've dreamed so much these last nights," continued Miranda, her eyes radiant with an unearthly glory, wandering from Maurice to Phillis, and back again to him. "Only last night I saw father, and he told me not to be troubled,—God would manage for poor mother. That has come true already, so I think my dream about you two will: don't you, Mr. Peyton?"

"I hope so," he replied, in a tremulous voice, glancing towards Phillis as he spoke, but she had retreated a little, so that her face was hidden in the shadow.

"Shall you and Miss Georgia go away soon?" the child asked, after a pause.

"Before very long, I suppose."

"And will Miss Phillis go with you?"

"This is my home, dear," Phillis said, quickly: "of course I shall stay here with my grandmother."

"Yes; but sometime! Oh, I guess you'll go with him sometime, because I dreamed, you know," said the child, smiling brightly at Maurice. "And if one dream has come true, another may,—mayn't it, Mr. Peyton?—and you would be glad to have it."

"Very glad," he replied, with such earnestness in his voice that Phillis started; "nothing in the whole world could make me so happy."

He did not look towards her; she did not venture to glance at him; but she knew that such words, uttered at such a moment, must force her to put aside the idea to which she had hitherto clung, that his feeling for her had no real depth, and the bare thought frightened her.

"She heard!" said the child. "She'll remember,—sometime, Mr. Peyton, *she'll remember.*"

She lay back rather wearily among her pillows, and Phillis said,—

"We must send Mr. Peyton away now; you oughtn't to talk any more, dear."

"And I'm sleepy again," the child answered. "Good-by, Maurice; that's what Miss Georgia calls you; it's such a pretty name."

"Good-by," he repeated, kissing her forehead. "I shall come and see you to-morrow, and bring my sister."

"Yes; and if I'm not here—you know!" she raised her hand and pointed upward, smiling still.

Maurice only said good-night to Phillis, and was moving away, when Miranda said,—

"Maybe I'll dream again about your being together. I'll tell her if I do! And sometime—oh, sometime you'll both remember what I dreamed,—oh, sometime!"

She turned her head on her pillow, and fell asleep before Peyton reached the window. He paused by the sill and looked back. Phillis was standing with her eyes fixed on the child; but something in her attitude assured him that she was conscious of his scrutiny. He gazed at her with one long, lingering, passionate glance, and then went softly out of the chamber.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE next morning, as early as he could venture to disturb his aunt, Maurice drove over to Wachuset in search of Georgia. They went back by the upper road, instead of taking that which led directly to the Nest, in order to inquire after Miranda.

Miss Raines appeared as the carriage stopped before the door. A glance at her face prevented the necessity for the question which rose to their lips.

The tired soul was at rest; the child had died shortly after sunrise in Phillis's arms. Miss French had gone home, and Ann Raines had come to pass the day with the bereaved mother, having arrived, she informed them, before the little girl breathed her last.

"I will go and speak to poor Mrs. Plummer, if you think she would like to see me," Georgia said.

"If anything could comfort her, that would," Miss Raines answered: "she about worships you and Miss Phillis, and that's the truth. She couldn't feel sorrier if the child had been hern, and sartin no creatur' ever had a better daughter than Miranda was."

"I shall only stop a few minutes," Georgia said to her brother, as he helped her out of the wagon.

"You needn't hurry," observed Miss Raines, taking an answer upon herself, and delivering it with a bland condescension which was beautiful to witness. "I'll stand here while you're gone. So I guess Mr. Peeton won't git very lonesome."

Neither of her listeners could repress a smile; but when Georgia had entered the house, Maurice began asking after Phillis, too full of the recollections of the past night's scene to be in a mood to tease Miss Raines in his usual laughing fashion.

"I am afraid Miss French must have been very tired," he said. "I hoped we should get here in time to take her home."

"Oh, it 'ud need more'n one night's watchin' to tucker out Miss Phillis," returned the spinster. "I brought some tea with me, and I made her a good strong cup afore she started; the walk ain't nothin' to speak of, and it'll do her good."

"And the poor little child passed away without pain; that is a comfort," said Peyton.

"It were indeed, and she was sensible up to the very last. She talked so beautiful to her stepma and the boys,—you never heerd the beat,—a preacher couldn't have spoke more consol'n', and she was as happy as ever you see a child. I ha'n't never been much addicted to religion myself, Mr. Peeton; my folks was Calvinists, and give me an overdose when I was little," Miss Raines said, as if speaking of a medicine. "But there's something in religion, when you get hold o' the right sort, and that was what Mirandy had, if ever anybody did."

"Yes," Maurice said, rather absently; he was thinking partly of Phillis, partly of the child,—wondering vaguely, as one does at such moments, when the little soul had awakened,—if she were conscious of the change, able to look back, *exulting over the freedom from pain*, the new sense of strength

and life. As he recalled the spirit-illuminated eyes that had gazed at him on the previous night, so far aloof from the weakness which numbed the physical frame, he involuntarily murmured,—

“She has seen the mystery hid
Under Egypt’s pyramid;
By those eyelids pale and close
Now she knows what Rhamsee knows.”

“Hey?” said Miss Raines, staring curiously at him.

“I was only trying to recollect a verse of a little poem,” he answered.

“Verses? Oh, yes; but the plaguy things never will stay in a body’s head. They’re poor stuff gen’rally, I suspicion. Miss Phillis she’s fond of ’um, though, and yet you couldn’t find a clearer head’n hern. It’s thinkin’ of little Mirandy set you off. Wall, there’s no denyin’ times likes these sort o’ stirs us up. I wish you could a’ heerd her talk. She spoke o’ you; it was a’most the last thing she said. Her ma had gone out a minit to warm a blanket to put round her feet ’cause they was cold,—no, I guess ’twas to call the littlest boy; wall, ’tain’t no matter which—”

“What did the child say?” interrupted Maurice.

“She looked up at Miss Phillis, and says she, ‘Tell Mr. Peeton I dreamed it again, and—’”

Miss Raines, softened by the recollection, had begun her sentence with a corner of her apron at her eyes, making a horrible grimace in order to keep back a sob, but when she had got so far in her narration she stopped abruptly and made a fresh grimace, but it was of dismay at her own blunder.

“‘I dreamed it again, and’—well, afterwards?” Maurice asked, impatiently.

He knew what the end of the sentence had been, but he wanted to hear it repeated and to ask what Phillis had said.

“I declare I clean forgot!” exclaimed Miss Raines. “Jest afore she went away, while we was havin’ a cup o’ tea, Miss Phillis she told me not to tell you what the child said; ’twasn’t no matter, and might worry you.”

“But you may as well finish now,” said Peyton.

“Wall,” returned Miss Raines, contritely, “I s’pose when you’ve let the head out ’tain’t no use tryin’ to hide there’s a cat in the bag; but don’t you tell Miss Phillis. Nothin’ riles

her like not keepin' your word, and I wouldn't ha' told for nothin', but I'm kind o' upset, and I said it afore I thought."

"I will tell no one; I give you my word," cried Maurice.

"Then this was the hull on it," says she: "'tell Mr. Peeton I dreamed it agin, and it's sure to come true sometime—sure!'"

At another moment Peyton might have derided his own folly, but, as he remembered the child's eyes when she had talked with him on the previous night, the smile with which she had regarded him, the strange, far-seeing glance which seemed to gaze away into futurity as she uttered that promise in regard to himself and Phillis, he could not help receiving it as an omen,—a prophecy upon which he might build.

"I don't know no more'n Adam what she meant," continued Miss Raines, "and you can't ask questions of Miss Phillis when she don't want you to; but it's atween you and me now, and you mustn't forget and let it out as I did."

"No, no; I promise. Did you hear what Miss Phillis said?"

"Oh, she didn't say anything, I guess: she just sat down behind the bed and cried like a baby, and she don't do that easy. But she was powerful fond o' that child, and to see her a-passin' away as meek as a lamb was too much for the minit, and no wonder, for pinks and hyacinths ain't sweeter 'n Mirandy was, and books on books not fuller of sense 'n that head o' hern."

And now Miss Raines broke down completely, proving that she had sensibilities and a heart under the cast-iron exterior which hid those qualities.

By the time she had dried her eyes, Georgia came back; the brother and sister bade the spinster good-morning, and drove on towards the Nest. As they came in sight of Bourke's house, Peyton said,—

"I shall miss Denis. He told me yesterday he had to go early this morning into Wachuset. He must have gone before now."

"I might as well get out here," observed Georgia: "it will save Joe Grimshaw's going down to bring the horse and wagon back, and I shall be glad of the walk."

"Just as you like," said Maurice. "I'll go through the fields *with you*."

The gate was open, and he drove in; but, as the carriage neared the house, Georgia saw Denis Bourke standing in the veranda. Had she supposed there was a chance of his being at home, she would not have uttered her proposition.

A sudden recollection of the first visit she had paid to his house rushed into her mind, of his coming out to welcome her as he was doing now. How long ago that time seemed!—how rapidly and how much she had lived since then! Oh, in spite of her resolves, her worldly theories to which she clung with a sort of frightened obstinacy, she was so changed in many ways; forced also to admit that the changes had gone too deep to be less than momentous,—as startling as they were important.

"Halloo, old man!" cried Maurice, as he checked his horses at the foot of the steps. "We didn't expect to find you! So you are back safe from your expedition."

"Oh, an hour ago," Bourke replied. "Good-morning, Miss Grosvenor: this is a very pleasant surprise."

"When two models like us give a surprise, it must necessarily be pleasant," returned Maurice, and Georgia was grateful to him for unconsciously aiding her by his words to obtain another instant to shake off the nervous sensation which her hasty reflection, as they approached the house, had roused.

"Of course," returned Denis, gayly, looking at Georgia, his eyes eloquent with pleasure which he made no effort to hide. "You will get out, now you are here, Miss Grosvenor?"

"I decided to walk the rest of the way," she said, as she let him help her to descend.

"You don't even ask where we come from so early," said Maurice.

"Oh, I know already: there are never any secrets in this neighborhood," replied Denis. "Miss Grosvenor spent the night with her aunt, and you have been to fetch her."

"You must own a private telephone, Mr. Bourke," said Georgia.

"Miss Raines is equal to half a dozen," he answered. "She stopped here on her way to Mrs. Plummer's, and told Patrick. So that poor child is out of her suffering?"

"Yes, happily," said Georgia.

"Shall I find Joe Grimshaw at the barn?" asked Maurice.

"Yes, but Patrick will take the horse round."

"I'll go myself; I want to speak to Joe a moment," said Peyton.

"You mustn't keep me waiting, Maurice," said Georgia: "I've oceans to do this morning, and want to get home."

"All right, my queen! I'll be back in a trice," said her brother, and drove off down the road which led to the stables.

"Will you come in, Miss Grosvenor?" Bourke asked.

"Thanks, no; it is too pleasant here. What a beautiful morning!"

"Perfect," said Bourke. "Do you know what I was thinking when I saw you drive up?"

"That I was a very early visitor, I should imagine," returned Georgia, laughing, though her heart beat a little quickly: she knew what thought had been in his mind.

"No; of the first time you ever came here,—how long ago it seems, and yet the time has fled so fast."

"Somehow it always does in a quiet place," said Georgia. "Had you and Mr. Caruthers a pleasant expedition?"

She asked the question merely to ward off any serious conversation, then, as soon as she had done so, remembered that to bring up that gentleman's name was the most unfortunate remark she could have offered, considering her wish.

"Oh, yes; we were all as jolly as possible! Three of the directors were with us,—your great admirer, old Mr. Winter, among the party. We barely escaped a drenching, and had to spend the night at Hummins's tavern."

"I hope you were comfortable," said Georgia, as seriously as if the matter were of vast importance.

"Perfectly. But please don't mind the expedition now. I want to say something to you, and I have only a moment,—that wretched Maurice will be back directly," said he, with his usual bluntness in following out any purpose, often putting Georgia at a disadvantage by a downrightness to which she was unaccustomed, and so getting his own way even when she felt vexed at her inability to combat his weapons,—she, who hitherto had always been so successful in managing her admirers.

"Please be good-natured, and don't tease me this morning," she said, taking refuge in feminine coaxing.

"I don't *mean* to tease you: I hope I never do that! But

this is a serious thing. You have not yet told Mr. Caruthers that you cannot marry him."

Georgia could only feel troubled, not irritated, by his persistence upon that subject, but she tried her best to turn his speech against himself.

"You must let me first decide what my own intentions are in regard to the matter," she said.

"Miss Grosvenor—Georgia!" he exclaimed, and, though his face and voice were full of tenderness, a tone of reproach was audible. "Why should you say this to me or yourself? You know that you do not mean it—you know—"

"I tell you I have not made up my mind," she interrupted.

"But you told me what must necessarily prevent your considering his proposal further," Bourke said, gravely, though speaking as gently as ever. "There are women who might defy their hearts and buy wealth and position at such an awful price, but you are not a woman like that; you can't do it."

"I don't know that I have much heart: haven't I told you so?" cried she, irritated, not against him, but at what she termed her own weakness in never being able to keep from being thrilled and moved by his presence and his words.

"You used to tell yourself so, but these months have taught you that it is idle to try any longer to believe it," he said.

"Mr. Bourke, you are taking a very unfair advantage of a few hasty words spoken when I was frightened and troubled," she answered.

"You admitted that you cared for me: neither you nor I can ever forget that," he said, softly, but looking in her face with eyes full of pride and exultant joy.

"And I told you then, as I have done since, that such caring was to be lived over,—rooted out," she said; but, firm as her words were, she could hear her voice quiver a little in their utterance.

"If it can be done!" he cried. "Ah, Georgia, you may call me vain, presumptuous, but you know that each day shows you more and more plainly how difficult that would be."

"Very well; I will not deny it," she answered. "But that only makes me the more resolute, for your sake and my own! I am not entirely selfish: I do think of you."

"You—selfish! You don't know what the word means!" he said, looking prouder and more exultant than before, and stirring Georgia's soul to its very depths by the infinite tenderness in his eyes.

"Oh, I can't talk to you this morning! Why doesn't Maurice hurry back?" she cried. "I have just come from seeing that poor woman; I am disturbed and nervous; you always seize some such moment to tyrannize; oh, I think it is you who are selfish!"

"I should be, if it were only of myself I thought," he replied. "But, putting my love out of the question, we are friends, Georgia, and I have a friend's right to warn you, and I must! You are unjust to Mr. Caruthers in keeping him in suspense."

"Really, it is very good of you to plead his cause!" retorted she, endeavoring to speak scornfully.

"Don't try," he said: "you can't sneer if you would. You know I am right; you know you will be more at peace when that matter is definitely settled."

"More at peace when I have thrown away what I prize,—wealth, position, the gratification of my ambitions?" demanded she.

"Yes; because your heart will cease to struggle and ache when it finds that you have placed it beyond your power to break it," he said. "Georgia, you can't marry Mr. Caruthers; you know that you cannot. Put yourself and him out of pain by telling him so."

"You have no right to interfere, no right to talk to me in this way," faltered she, vainly trying still to be angry.

"Every right," he answered; "because I love you; because you care for me; and it is my sacred duty to help you to guard yourself from unhappiness."

"I protest, you take a strange way to guard me," she exclaimed, half laughing, yet near tears; "doing your best to convince me that a little—a little folly on my part where you are concerned ought to lead me on far enough to—to—"

"To make you listen to your heart and mine," he whispered.

She started up from her seat.

"Since Maurice does not appear, I shall go in search of him," said she.

Bourke laid his hand gently on hers as it rested upon the back of her chair.

"I know that you will do what is right, though you do try to be vexed," he said. "You will not delay any longer; you will tell Mr. Caruthers the truth."

"I shall make no promise," she answered.

"But you will do it,—do it at once!"

And Georgia could not contradict, for she knew that she should at the first opportunity. The burden of concealment had been growing each day more intolerable, and somehow, as she listened to Bourke, and saw her hesitation by the honest light in his loving eyes, her having so long deferred her explanation to Mr. Caruthers seemed worse than a weakness,—a deliberate wrong to him, as cruel as it was dishonorable.

"Yes; I will do it,—to-day if possible," she replied.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, with a deep breath of satisfaction, and again that exultant eagerness kindled his face; but the very thrill which it roused in Georgia's heart was an added consciousness of weakness, to fight against which she nerved herself to say,—

"And after that, Mr. Bourke, you must leave me to the peace you have promised such action would bring."

"It will come, independently of me," he said.

"You must understand," she hurried on, "that in both cases—for him and for you—my decision is irrevocable. If I am silly enough to let romantic scruples stand in the way of my future, I am not weak enough to allow romance to ruin that future utterly."

He only patted her hand softly, and said, as he might have spoken to a wayward child,—

"Poor Georgia! poor little Georgia! How hard she tries to make herself believe her false theories stronger than her heart; but they are not—they are not."

"Her reason and common sense can act still, Denis Bourke; she will never reach any pass where they will wholly lose their sway, you may be sure of that," she answered, in as cold a voice as she could summon. Then her conscience pricked her so sorely that she could not resist adding, "Oh, you make me say such harsh things to you! I don't want to! I can't bear to have you think me unwomanly, utterly hard and strong."

"I shall never think you anything but the most impulsive and generous of women," he said.

"I am not! I am not!" she cried. "I hate to talk so, but I, you must understand, I must convince you that this—this folly is at an end. We are friends; we can never be anything more."

But he only whispered,—

"I love you, and you—you care for me!"

At that instant, to Georgia's intense relief, Maurice came up the lane; but she was aware that she felt a greater necessity to escape from her own weakness than even to quit Denis Bourke and his pleadings.

She wanted a moment to herself before meeting Maurice, and said, hastily,—

"I must speak to Tabitha."

She hurried off just as Maurice reached the steps.

"Where is Georgia going?" he asked, catching the flutter of her dress as she ran down the hall.

"Only to the kitchen; she and P. French always pet old Tabitha when they come here," Bourke answered.

The two men stood for a few moments in the door, talking about unimportant matters. Presently Georgia appeared at the farther end of the corridor, calling,—

"Come, Maurice! Good-morning, Mr. Bourke! I am in a terrible hurry, and cannot wait to be ceremonious."

Away she sped, so fast that Maurice did not overtake her till she reached the zigzags; but, whatever he might have thought about the abruptness of her departure, he made no remark.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MR. CARUTHERS had been growing restless and somewhat uneasy during these past days. He perceived a great change in Georgia,—not in her manner towards himself; she treated him as she had always done,—as a valued friend; but there was a nervousness about her, amounting at times to actual trouble, the cause for which he tried by close study to fathom.

Aunt Conyngham remained wilfully blind, as acute people sometimes do at an important crisis, declaring that she saw nothing odd in Georgia; the dear girl was not so thoroughly restored to health as she had expected to find her, but otherwise they had every reason for satisfaction.

She fairly laughed at Mr. Caruthers's fears, rooted firmly in her belief that he would eventually win his prize,—a credence based principally, though she did not tell him so, on a conviction that a young woman brought up under her charge could not be insane enough to fling away a future more brilliant and satisfactory in every respect than life was likely again to offer.

The restraint she exercised to keep aloof from the dangerous subject and avoid all risk of annoying her niece showed positive heroism; and, perceiving it, Georgia rather pitied the autocratic, managing woman, though she reflected that, after all she was herself the person needing sympathy. When Aunt Conyngham learned her decision, as she soon must, a storm would burst such as had never disturbed the usually even tenor of their domestic relations, and might indeed break them up wholly, for Georgia knew that, roused beyond a certain limit her relative could be very hard and unforgiving.

The day after her visit to Bourke's house, Miss Grosvenor was sitting alone in the garden: she believed herself meditating, but was only allowing dreary fancies to stray at will through her mind. She had refused to go and walk with Phillis and Maurice; grandma had lain down; and she trusted that at this hour no visitor would be likely to appear. But she had not sat there long when she saw Denis Bourke coming along the centre path.

She had been in one of her worst moods all the morning,—mortified by her inability to use her reason, railing at the inconsistency which prevented her accepting a destiny replete with wealth and influence,—and the sight of the joy in Denis's face roused her to hot anger,—anger against herself and him, and mixed therewith a sharp, bitter pain, a wild, passionate regret over the necessity of giving up her beautiful dream.

"Actually alone!" he exclaimed, approaching with outstretched hands. "I began to think I should never find you so again."

"I stayed alone from choice," she replied, trying to speak coldly, but hearing that her voice only sounded querulously plaintive.

"And you wish I would go away?" he said, smiling still, with that eager look in his eyes, which set her heart beating like a frightened bird's.

"Yes, I do," she answered, aware that she was behaving like a capricious child, rather than her ordinary composed, well-mannered self.

"Then I will," said he. "At least I have had a peep at you. I had not seen you all day, and—"

"Oh!" she broke in, with a gesture which declared plainly that any word of pleading or tenderness would drive her to the verge of disgust.

"And I could not decide whether the dimple in your right cheek or the left was the deepest," he continued, putting his head on one side and surveying her with ludicrous gravity.

The conclusion of the sentence was so different from what she had expected,—so much more like Maurice's absurd fun than Bourke's usual conduct,—and the nonsense so out of keeping with her own excited voice and almost tragic gesture, that in spite of herself she could not keep from laughing.

"It is the left," cried he. "I said so; but P. French vowed that it was the right, and dared me to come and look. I met her and Maurice."

"P. French is one of the few people in the world who can be graceful in her absurdity," observed Georgia, dryly, with a new attempt at stateliness.

"Now, don't be hard on a fellow," laughed Denis. "I dare say I am more awkward than ever these last few days; but, you see, I never was really happy before, and it makes me quite wild."

She half rose.

"Going?" he demanded.

"I asked you to," she said, emphasizing the second pronoun.

"Ah, so you did," he answered, with unimpaired cheerfulness. "I know sometimes one is not in the mood to see any human being."

"Indeed yes," said Georgia, though she began to feel

ashamed of her behavior, and added, "Please don't think me the rudest woman you ever met, Mr. Bourke."

He came close to her and whispered,—

"You may treat me as you like. I shall not complain." He took her hand for an instant, but did not offer to kiss it. "God bless you, Georgia!" he cried, and walked away through the garden.

As he disappeared, she saw Herbert Caruthers coming up the path from the gate. He was so near that he must have seen Bourke holding her hand, perhaps have caught his parting exclamation,—must see, too, the vivid carnation which had suddenly dyed her cheeks; but that faded as quickly as it came; she felt herself turn pale and cold.

But, whatever Mr. Caruthers might have seen, he approached with his ordinary composure; though as she glanced at him she fancied that the maintaining it was an effort, and she knew that the moment of explanation had arrived.

"Good-morning, Miss Grosvenor," he said, holding out his hand.

"Good-morning. I need not ask after my aunt, for I saw her in the forenoon. She and Mrs. Thirstane were going to drive over to some place near Crampton."

"Yes; they have gone. Your aunt told me you had been at the hotel. I was sorry to have missed you."

"And you were not tempted to drive with them?"

"I don't think they wanted anybody. They seemed to have some mystery on foot from which all masculine creatures were to be excluded."

"I fancy Mrs. Thirstane means to delude that rich old coal-dealer who has given his name to the village, into bestowing something more substantial for the hospital she worries all her friends about so constantly."

"Very possibly," he said, a little absently.

"Will you sit down?" she asked, pointing to a chair near. "You did not walk over?"

"No, I rode; but I left my horse at the stable by the post-office," he answered, seating himself opposite her. "I am very fortunate in finding you alone."

Almost the very words with which Denis Bourke had saluted her; only Denis had let his eyes imply the good luck *he considered it*, and had thereby gained in eloquence.

"Miss French has gone out, and the dear old grandma is lying down," Georgia said, just for the sake of saying something.

"Not indisposed, I trust?" said Mr. Caruthers, in a tone of polite interest, which showed that his remark emanated from the same source as her own.

"Oh, no; but, as she rises early, she usually finds the need of a little rest in the afternoon," Georgia explained.

"Very naturally at her age," said Mr. Caruthers.

"Oh, very naturally," echoed Georgia, and knew they were both behaving as if their brains had softened. There might be some excuse for the man, but there was none for her. "May I get you some iced lemonade?" she asked. "Or I can give you claret and ice? Maurice keeps me liberally supplied with claret and sherry, for his own convenience."

But Mr. Caruthers would have neither the mild beverage nor the stimulant. He was not thirsty,—rarely drank even a glass of water between his meals. Upon receiving this valuable bit of information, Georgia observed that the rule was no doubt an excellent one, and added that Americans were too much given to iced drinks of all sorts; and he agreed with her. Oh, they were both rapidly growing more and more imbecile; all her fault too.

However, in a moment Mr. Caruthers made it apparent that he did not intend to be further affected by her idiocy, for he observed,—

"I am very glad to have found you alone; there is a good deal that I want to say, if you can have the patience to listen."

He was rushing into the middle of things at once; she must speak,—must tell him,—and it was so hard!

"I did not want you to fear I had come here to persecute you," he said, before she had managed even a monosyllable in reply to his first speech; "so I have waited and—and tried to make myself as pleasant as I know how," he concluded, with the grave smile which suited his face so well.

"You are always everything that is kind," Georgia said, quickly, longing by some means to soften the blow which she must deal.

"At all events, it is like you to say so," he answered.

He paused there; she could not articulate a syllable; could only sit wondering stupidly if he would never speak again,—

wondering, too, how she was to reply. She felt so guilty towards him; that was the prominent reflection in her mind, and mingled therewith came an odd sensation, not exactly regret, not wholly anger, a kind of vehement outcry against fate and her own folly, because she must throw away the prize she had always longed for,—worldly honors and wealth, with respect and esteem for the person who bestowed them upon her. He looked, too, so thorough a gentleman in the highest signification of the much ill-treated word,—so thoroughly gentle and noble! It was only necessary to study his face to gain the certainty that he had never in his whole life committed an action for which he need blush; and, in addition, the features revealed so much intellectual strength that in spite of the fine lines which had begun to gather about the eyes, and the tinge of gray here and there silvering his thick curling chestnut locks, it would not have been easy to find any youthful countenance more attractive.

Now he resumed his speech; it seemed to Georgia that he had been silent an endless while, and she countless leagues away, even while thinking brokenly the things I have set down.

"You know I have as yet decided nothing about my plans for the next few years," he said; "or rather you have not, for I wrote you that I should leave the decision in your hands."

It required a terrible effort, but she must speak; she must! She thought that she could never again endure such pain as she did in this moment, not even if called upon to pronounce sentence against her own heart. He had gone beyond admiration,—he loved her; and the new strange personal experience which had come during these past weeks rendered her more sympathetic, because better able to appreciate his disappointment.

"In your hands," he repeated.

"You must not, Mr. Caruthers," she said, tremulously: "you must form your own decision, entirely independent of me in any way."

She glanced up at him with a face that pleaded for pardon, full of sympathy and regret. The look rather than the words brought home to him a conviction of her meaning. He grew white to his very lips, but his voice was much more composed than hers, as he slowly answered,—

"Tell me exactly what I am to understand by that, Miss Grosvenor."

"Oh, you know!" she cried. "I am very sorry—I—oh, Mr. Caruthers, don't force me to say it more plainly!"

Whiter he could not grow; but Georgia thought that never, while life lasted, could she forget the exquisite suffering depicted in his features; and yet he looked at her with a smile so full of kindness, of sympathy for the misery this confession cost her, that she longed to fall at his feet and beseech forgiveness.

"I told you I did not intend to persecute you," he said. "I will not distress you if I can help! I will say it for you: you mean you cannot give me any hope."

She bowed her head; he turned his away for a little, but she could see his whole frame tremble, while his hands knotted themselves hard over the arms of his chair; yet, when he glanced back at her, that kindly, pitying smile was still on his lips.

"You are speaking after months of reflection," he said. "I know you meant to be just,—to yourself and me—"

"Oh, Mr. Caruthers!"

"Yes; I understand. But I don't want you to feel self-reproach; there is no reason why you should. No human being could deal more fairly by another than you have by me from first to last; never dream that I shall think anything else."

"You are so good,—so good," she murmured.

It was all she could say; but no words could have expressed her respect. She felt that, much as she had always admired him, she had never half appreciated his nobleness; and she was sending him away—for what? A folly, a romantic dream, which she knew could never be realized. Oh, surely never before was woman so mad,—so hopelessly idiotic!

"You have decided that you cannot marry me," he continued, after a pause; and it seemed to Georgia that if some great hero, unjustly condemned, were reading his own death-warrant, he would have read it in the same tone. "You cannot marry me! I—I don't want to hurt you; I know how your kind heart feels for me; but I find that I have been more presumptuous than I knew. I have built hopes which you never gave me any right to do. I—well, you must say

it; somehow I can't believe till I have heard you. Forgive me; don't think me cruel."

"Oh, I think you are the noblest man in the world!" she cried, struggling to keep back her tears.

"But you cannot marry me?"

"I cannot," she faltered; "I cannot."

And now a sob choked her utterance, and two hot drops rolled slowly down her cheeks.

"Don't—don't cry!" he exclaimed. "It makes me feel such a brute to see you suffer!"

"Oh, if you knew how ashamed I am,—how guilty I feel!" she said.

"There is no reason, Miss Grosvenor,—none. Believe me, no personal pain can be so great as to know that I am causing you suffering. I repeat it, from first to last you have been more than just,—generous; and I thank you."

This final stroke was more than Georgia's morbidly-roused conscience could bear. She covered her face with her hands, and wept unrestrainedly. She heard him utter broken words of pained expostulation, but could not check her sobs. Then he rose, and paced up and down the garden path. She appeared doomed of late in any crisis to behave in a manner so unlike what she was accustomed to doing—to show herself weak and childish in moments demanding the most need of appearing a real woman—that her self-respect was quite crushed. To sit helplessly weeping at this juncture, when she ought to be comforting him,—taking advantage of her feminine privilege of weakness, as if she did it to keep him from blaming her,—seemed so unworthy that for the rest of her days she must heartily despise this miserable creature, so different from all former conceptions of her own identity.

She struggled into an assumption of composure at length, and called, softly,—

"Mr. Caruthers!"

He came back to where she sat. And now a new fancy hurt her bewildered sense: a strong brave man, returning from a grave where he had just buried everything which could make life worth possessing, might look as he did!

"You are better: that is right," he said, gently.

"Yes, yes. Forgive me for teasing you by my tears. I—I don't cry very often."

"I ought to thank you, since they were a sign of sympathy for me," he answered. "But I can't have you suffer: that hurts me worse than—I mean, I can't bear it."

"And we are friends—you promise?"

"While life lasts," he said, solemnly, extending his hand. She held it for an instant between hers, with a glow of respect such as she had never before felt for any human being. If she could be said to have any thought clear amid the trouble in her mind, it was a wonder over her own stupidity in never having appreciated this man, and added thereto a consciousness that, had she been clear-sighted enough, noble enough, to do so, she should have loved him from the first. "And now let us talk as two friends ought," he continued, after a brief pause, as she withdrew her hands and let them fall in her lap. "We cannot leave the matter just here; but try to think it is not I who am speaking,—I mean not the man who asked you to be his wife, but the friend whom you can trust, to whom your peace and happiness are dearer than his own."

"Say anything you like," she said, her voice quivering anew, her remorseful admiration, if possible, growing stronger at each fresh proof of his magnanimity.

"It is this. Don't forget there was to be no love asked on your side. Wait—wait; you need not tremble! It is not the tiresome man who has worried you so long that speaks; it is your friend,—your friend, who would give his life to serve you!"

Oh, the infinite tenderness of his voice!—oh, the super-human sweetness of his smile! both elevated, inspired fairly, by the strength which comes to one who has fought and conquered, reached the height so few human beings ever attain, complete victory over self, the ability to regard personal aims as nothing compared to the welfare of the object beloved.

"If I were only worthy," she murmured. "Oh, I don't deserve your goodness, I don't deserve it!"

"Hush, hush!" he said. "My friend deserves everything that is best and brightest. This was what I wanted to say. That tiresome Herbert promised to be content with friendship, with esteem: you can give him those?"

"Such as I shall never give any other living soul," she cried.

"Then—oh, don't think me cruel; but in that case, it seems to me, there is hope left him still."

"No," she gasped, "none,—none."

While he was speaking, a momentary light had flashed into his eyes; it died out under her words, leaving the face with a new pain upon it,—a sudden and terrible fear.

"That could not be," he said, "unless these later months have brought you what you used to think would never come near your heart."

She was silent; her eyes sank under his, a burning blush suffused her cheeks: he was answered.

"Then it is so? There is some one who stands between us,—between you and the man who hoped to call you his wife?"

"Yes," she whispered.

She dared not look up: she heard him give one gasping breath, then everything was still for a little. Presently he said,—

"You are sure? There is some man you love?"

"It's a folly,—a madness,—and I know it!" she exclaimed. "But that is it! If—if—things were as when we parted—but I cannot—it would be wicked—you would not let me!"

Her voice died away in a sob; again silence followed, she sitting with her head bowed upon her hand. At last he said,—

"I must go now. I—I am a good deal shaken; I had not thought of that happening. Forgive me if I have hurt you. To-morrow—I will see you to-morrow. But we are friends,—always friends; remember that."

He walked away without further leave-taking; she let him go without a word, without looking up.

After a while she, too, rose, went into the house, and mounted the stairs to her chamber. Phillis and Maurice were entering by the door at the farther end of the long passage; she did not perceive them. Maurice was about to call to her, but Phillis had caught sight of Georgia's face; she signed to him not to speak. They stood quiet until she disappeared, then Phillis stepped back upon the grass.

"What is it? What do you mean?" Maurice demanded, in wonder. "You are as mysterious as if something astounding had happened."

"Something has happened," returned Phillis: "if you were

not as dull as only a man can be, you would have perceived that."

"What?"

"She has sent Mr. Caruthers away."

"O-oh!" ejaculated Maurice, his surprise too great for other utterance.

Phillis moved towards the garden, and he followed.

"Poor Georgia!" she said; "I must leave her alone for a while. I am very sorry for her."

"I didn't believe she'd have done it!" cried Maurice.

"That's because you are incapable of appreciating her," said Phillis.

"I devote all my energies to appreciating you," he answered.

"A terrible waste of time."

"Do you mean you are not worth it?"

"Or that it is a task beyond your powers, Sir Modesty."

"When will you begin to believe in me?" he asked.

"I believe lots of things about you already," retorted she.

"You know you will have to be convinced at last," he exclaimed. "I shall no more give up than—oh, than Jacob did when he served so long for that very deceitful Rachel."

"At present, I think it is I who serve: you want more waiting on than any man I ever saw."

"A slander; but no matter. Say, when do you mean to believe in me?"

"I'll consider the business; that is, if you can produce any foundation for a belief."

"You have it, and you know you have. Come, if I serve as patiently as Jacob,—not so long, for we are not patriarchs—"

"You will be before that time comes."

"But when it does,—months or years hence,—for I'll never give up!—when you are forced to admit that I love you—"

"Yes; skip the poetry."

"What will you say?"

He tried to take her hands, but she put them behind her back. He thought she looked a little conscious, though; the dimples which swarmed about her mouth gave way to a sudden sweet gravity of expression. He could almost hope she was touched, but he knew that any show of earnestness, any open pleading, would do no good whatever.

"What will you answer?" he persisted.

"I shall say—go back to Leah!" she cried, and, with a merry laugh, ran off to join her grandmother, whom she had just seen come out of the house.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BOURKE did not visit the Nest that night, and the next morning when Georgia went down-stairs very late, pale and heavy-eyed from the effects of a dismal vigil, unduly and unwillingly prolonged till near daylight, Phillis met her with highly acceptable tidings.

"We are going to have peace," she said: "your brother and Messrs. Bourke and Caruthers have gone off with a party of other tiresome men on some wild-goose expedition, goodness knows where, and won't be back till bedtime."

Georgia rejoiced to hear the tidings, and while eating her breakfast received a note from her aunt which afforded her equal satisfaction. Mrs. Conyngham and Sibyl Mayford were going to spend the day with some acquaintance of the Thirstanes: so there would be no one to intrude upon the repose which Georgia so sorely needed.

And very pleasant the respite proved: Phillis was kindness itself, only betraying her perception of her friend's trouble and agitation by the utmost gentleness and consideration, while grandma, saying and believing that Georgia had overtasked her strength lately by too many fatiguing expeditions, petted her in the sweetest imaginable fashion.

"It has been perfectly delightful, Phil," pronounced Georgia, as they were separating for the night. "I wish the rest of the earth would break off, and just leave you and grandma and me to be quiet in the Nest—oh, for a year at least."

"I wish it would," said Phillis; "though I am afraid we should peck at each other a good deal, if there were no other birds for us to peck. Now, to prove that you have enjoyed yourself, go to sleep and don't wake till morning. I will not have you take up those wretched town tricks you had when you first came, of not eating and sleeping, and so I tell you fairly."

•

"Oh, Phil, how long ago it seems!" cried Georgia.

"It does and it doesn't," quoth Phillis. "To bed, young woman, to bed! If your light is not out in a quarter of an hour, you'll have the person of the house to deal with; and if you look as tired to-morrow as you have lately, there'll be such a reckoning in store for you, old lady,—such a reckoning!"

"I won't: I mean to sleep," Georgia declared.

She kept her word; she really passed a comfortable night, and appeared so refreshed the next morning that grandma and Phillis were in ecstasies; she felt, too, mentally stronger and clearer than she had done for days.

She ordered her horse early, without waiting for Maurice to make his appearance, took a gallop over the hills, then rode into the town to see her aunt.

But there her restored spirits met with a check. She learned that their departure must be still further—even indefinitely—prolonged.

Mrs. Mayford had fallen in getting out of the carriage the evening before, and sprained her ankle. The Thirstanes were obliged to go back to town immediately, having received news of the illness of a near relative,—an illness so dangerous that none of the family could remain behind.

"Of course I must stop," Mrs. Conyngham said. "I can't leave poor Sibyl alone."

"I suppose not," Georgia replied. "Oh, dear me! I am very sorry for her; but she is always doing something inconsiderate."

"This time it is her misfortune! Naturally, she wouldn't have sprained her ankle if she could have helped it."

"Still, if she hadn't tried to skip like the hills in Scripture just to show her agility, it wouldn't have happened," Georgia said, laughing.

"Oh, you dislike her, you know."

"And you must admit I have reason. She detests me, and never hesitates to show it in all sorts of mean, petty ways."

"Ah, that is on account of Mr. Caruthers!" cried Aunt Conyngham. "Poor Sibyl! She always hoped to catch him at last: it was cruel of you to come back from Europe and upset her plans."

"Why, he dislikes her worse than I do."

"I know it, my dear, and so does she, only her vanity refuses to recognize the fact! She is not bad, merely weak; and I am fond of her, though we do quarrel when she grows catty about you! There is no help for it; I can't desert her: so you must make up your mind to stop."

"At all events, the weather is charming, and promises to hold," Georgia said, occupied mentally in wondering what fate meant by such persistence in detaining her in this spot, which had become filled with elements of unrest that rendered it very different from the enchanted land it had at first appeared.

"And we will keep Mr. Caruthers as long as we can," observed Aunt Conyngham, looking her full in the face.

"We will allow Mr. Caruthers to do just as he pleases! We can't condemn him to stop here forever because we seem likely to do so," replied Georgia, pleasantly, though with an inward quaking lest her relative might choose this opportunity to ask difficult questions.

"Now, own that he grows more charming every day!" cried Aunt Conyngham.

"Indeed I will!" Georgia said.

"And that I have been very good—"

"Yes, yes!"

"But you must not be too hard on him! My dear girl, I know—I have always been certain—what your decision will eventually be. You were quite right to take time for reflection; but remember how much you have had."

To Georgia's great relief, Rosalie appeared at this critical juncture with the information that Mrs. Mayford would be glad to see Miss Grosvenor.

But the little lady had deceived herself in thinking she should enjoy the visit. The sight of Georgia looking brilliantly handsome—at her very best, as she always appeared in a riding-habit—proved too much for Mrs. Mayford's nerves, as the mirror opposite the couch where she lay showed her own image older and more faded than usual, after a long night of pain.

In a few moments she began to put out her claws; Georgia was sorry enough for her to display exemplary patience, which so highly exasperated the widow that she proceeded to scratch, rendering herself so disagreeable that Aunt Conyngham at length

rebelled and told her she was too tired to talk, therefore they would go away.

But a pleading message soon followed them; the doctor had not arrived; the injured ankle required bathing; would Mrs. Conyngham please return?

"Wait till I come back, Georgia," said her aunt.

"I will, if madam doesn't keep you too long; but I don't want to miss seeing Maurice," Georgia answered.

Mrs. Conyngham departed, rather objugating fate because it had not sent Mr. Caruthers to take advantage of the opportunity her absence offered. Luckily, she met him in the hall.

"I was just coming to ask how you find yourself this morning," he said, "though I feared it might be unconscionably early."

"Not a bit! But Sibyl Mayford has just sent for me; go and entertain Georgia—she is in my room—till I come back."

So, after a little talk concerning the invalid, Mr. Caruthers walked on and tapped at the door of the salon, and Mrs. Conyngham hurried away to her post of duty, so well satisfied that she was prepared to bear with her patient in an exemplary fashion she might not have been able to do, but for the kindness fate had shown in sending Mr. Caruthers along at the right instant.

Georgia, hearing the knock, supposed it to be a servant, and was somewhat taken aback when, in answer to her permission to enter, the opening door brought her face to face with Mr. Caruthers. However, it was too nonsensical to let herself be fluttered, and he came forward with his usual manner so unaltered, greeting her so pleasantly and easily, that his example helped to overcome her feeling of restraint.

"I was coming to ask after your aunt," he said, "but I met her going to visit her patient. She told me I should find you here, and gave me leave to keep you company. You have been out for an early ride, I see."

"Yes; the morning was so lovely that I could not resist the temptation," Georgia answered. "I was very sorry to hear of Mrs. Mayford's accident."

"She passed a tolerable night, Mrs. Conyngham tells me. The doctor says if she is careful she will be all right in ten days or so,—at least able to travel."

"I am afraid the difficulty will be to make her careful," Georgia said.

"She is a very restless little person, certainly," returned Mr. Caruthers, with a somewhat quizzical smile.

"And indeed a sprain requires more patience than most people can find," Georgia said, with a good nature which Mrs. Mayford would have been far from showing in regard to her had the cases been reversed. "If one is really ill, one somehow finds the fortitude to endure; but to be tied fast to a sofa by a troublesome ankle might have irritated Job himself."

"Yes," Mr. Caruthers assented, rather absently. Georgia feared that he was going to let the conversation drop; she dreaded a silence; it seemed a pity for him not to assist, when they had a topic ready to hand, upon which they might enlarge indefinitely without effort. But before she could manage any other remark, either in regard to sprains in general or Mrs. Mayford's particular misfortune, he said, "So your stay here will be still further prolonged?"

"Aunt really cannot leave her poor friend alone," Georgia replied; "but indeed she doesn't seem to mind stopping."

"And you?"

"Oh, on some accounts—I mean I believe I was ready to go home," she said, coloring at the thought in her mind,—the reason which had made her willing, eager to get away.

"Will you answer a question frankly,—without any fear of hurting my feelings?"

"Well?" she asked.

"Your aunt is good enough to want me to stop as long as I can: will it annoy you if I do?"

"I should be the most ungrateful woman in the world if it would!" she exclaimed.

He smiled rather sadly at her exaggerated mode of speech, which rose out of her gratitude at this fresh evidence of his consideration for her, but only said,—

"Then I shall stay for a while."

"I am sure you could not find a lovelier place for enjoying this fine weather: it really seems a shame to shut one's self up between city walls as long as it lasts."

He bowed assent.

"I have to thank you," he said, "for trusting your friend."

"I shall always do that," she answered, eagerly. "I wish,

Mr. Caruthers, I could make you understand how deeply I appreciate all your goodness to me,—your patience with me!"

Then she remembered these were cold crumbs of comfort to offer a man whom she had refused the one thing she could give which he would have prized, and wished she had remained silent.

"I don't know about the goodness or patience," he said; "but I suppose there can be no real friendship unless both parties display the two."

A few days before she would have mentally styled this a very stiff, lawyer-like speech, but it did not strike her so now.

"I'm afraid," she observed, "that I have not much of either quality to show."

"I can't permit my friends to be maligned," he said, with that rare smile which she had only yesterday discovered was so beautiful. "But, since we have strayed into certain allusions, there is one thing I wish to render clear."

He looked for her permission to continue: she made a little sign with her hand.

"I don't want any cloud—not the slightest—to disturb our friendship; we must understand each other completely, else there would unavoidably rise a sort of restraint between us, which, to me at least, would be very painful."

"And to me," she said.

"Then I wish to ask just where among your friends—your male friends, I mean, of course—I am to have my place?"

"First and foremost!" she answered, heartily. "I respect and honor you above any man I know; and I am glad you have given me an opportunity to avow it."

"And you make me a very proud man in so doing! Now, all the rest I can say easily enough. What I want is this,—if you can do it: I want you to put out of your mind the ground upon which we have stood during these past months,—to count our friendships as if they had never existed."

"In so far as the regret at having caused you pain will permit, I promise," she said, though feeling a little natural surprise that he could so easily throw by the recollection.

"It is to hinder your having any regret—you ought to have none, because you have been frank and honest from first to last—that I wish you not to think. Now, I am not saying

that somewhere in the future I may not again ask you to marry me."

"Oh, Mr. Caruthers! How then would anything be changed?"

"But it could never, of course, happen until your present feelings have entirely altered; and—forgive my presumption—I hold it not improbable that such a season may arrive. Is it wrong to say these things? does it trouble you?"

"Not as you put them,—not from you," she answered, rather faintly, wishing devoutly that she could tell him the whole, lay bare her confusion, her bewilderment, beg his counsel in her strait, in this struggle between her reason and her heart, when she knew that to allow the latter to obtain the least advantage would be madness.

"I don't know how far your frankness with your friend could go," he went on, slowly, as if afraid of using any word, any turn of phrase, which might possibly annoy her; "but at least you are sure you may trust me with anything which you can bring yourself to speak about."

She looked at him with her beautiful eyes full of tears.

"I think I could tell you anything in the world," she said; "you are so strong, so good; and no woman could be more gentle. Yes, I should like to speak! Until yesterday I would not have believed it possible; but I seem to know you so much better, and yet it seems so selfish—so—"

She stopped, and put her hand before her face for an instant.

"Selfish with your friend!" he said, in gentle reproach.

"Yes, I am selfish! I ought to be thinking of you, and all the while it is this miserable Georgia Grosvenor who fills my mind. Oh, she has been the bane of my life!"

"Certainly, never such to others; I think not to you," he said. "My dear friend, you are very young yet; I know it does not seem so to you, but at twenty-two life is only just beginning! Your mistake has been that you fancied you had gone beyond the possibility of new feelings,—the dreams and romance which you had seen come to other girls,—and now you are confused and lost, to find all your old landmarks swept away."

"Yes, that is it!"

"It would be an empty affectation, Georgia—mayn't I call *you so*?"

"Of course!"

"A foolish pretence for me to appear ignorant of when and where this dream came to you,—of its object."

She stirred restlessly; her color came and went, and he asked, quickly,—

"Can you bear this? May I go so far?"

Again she signed him to continue.

"From such opportunity as I have had to judge,—and you know my professional experience has made me a tolerably acute observer,—I think him a man any woman might be proud to care for and to be loved by. But that is not enough, Georgia. This is a hard world; sometimes the surest proof of affection a woman can give is in disregarding it, going steadily and bravely on, as if it did not exist."

"Often! If girls would only realize this, there would be many less unhappy women in existence; many less wretched men, made so because the woman had not the courage to sacrifice herself and the man for his sake."

"I knew we should be of one mind there," he said; and the words might have appeared unpleasantly triumphant had not the tone in which they were uttered caused them to sound like a regret that it was necessary to be forced to such conclusion. "And now, Georgia, in this particular instance—"

She held up her hands appealingly.

"It is just the maddest folly in the world," she cried. "Nobody could see that more plainly than I. There! it is said: I am quite at ease with you now! That is why I wanted to go away; it seemed wilful wickedness to stop; and yet heaven and earth appear to combine to keep me here!"

"To go too soon might be an error," he said; "better at first face a dilemma where there is possibility of action,—of striving. A dream looks all the brighter when one regards it from distance and solitude."

"Oh, I don't know what is wisest or best!" sighed Georgia. "Anyway, for the present it is settled, in spite of me, that I must remain."

"But you are not afraid for yourself?"

"No; at bottom I am too selfish. I talk about sacrifice: I'm not capable of making the smallest!" she exclaimed, with remorseful energy.

"I am confident, on the contrary, that you are capable of the greatest, and that you mean to prove it."

She shook her head in impatience, not of him, but of herself, or her own estimate of that self, which, after all, she as yet knew very little about.

"Oh, I do always what laziness and pride and love of the world, and all the other cardinal sins, impel me to!" she said.

"No, no. In that case you would not have hesitated to marry a man for his wealth and position."

"Well, I trust there is some limit to my pettiness."

She tried to speak playfully, but she suddenly looked so pale and weary—nowadays those much tried physical nerves of hers refused to bear any continued strain—that Mr. Caruthers said,—

"We have talked enough for one morning. I can't have you worried, either by yourself or me. Come, we have gained something; at all events, now you can feel that, in whatever way your friend may best serve you, he is ready and glad to do."

She hesitated a little, and then said,—

"My aunt—she has not heard?"

"I have nothing to tell her," he answered, "until such time as you may think fitting."

"Ah, thanks! I think I must ride back. Mrs. Mayford is sure to keep Aunt Conyngham all the morning."

"She certainly will as long as she thinks you are here," he replied, with a smile, perceiving that it would be an effort for Georgia to encounter her relative. "I have to meet the directors of the coal company: when I see Mrs. Conyngham at luncheon, I will explain that I was obliged to go, and that you got tired of waiting."

He accompanied her down-stairs and put her on her horse. She rode away in better spirits, greatly relieved on Mr. Caruthers's account, and encouraged by the thought that now an entire confidence had been established between them, his wise, gentle counsels would aid her resolves.

He stood gazing after her, and the moment the necessity for restraint was removed, he looked tired and worn. It had been a severe blow to find that another man had intruded between Georgia and himself; but after surveying the matter from every point, regardless of the pain at his heart, his acute intellect had pointed out a course of conduct which might

render his disappointment and suffering merely temporary. He was very sorry for Georgia, and, apart from personal motives, his duty appeared plain,—to help her against her own weakness. That she would end by marrying Denis Bourke he did not for an instant believe, and he could have conceived of no conclusion to the little romance more disastrous to both, considering the woman's character and habits and the man's position; for Mr. Caruthers deemed Georgia a person to whom wealth and luxury were essentially necessary. Her supposed love for Bourke was purely a girlish dream; and, judging from his knowledge of her, he held it as certain as any axiom in geometry that it must soon fade,—die out so completely as not to leave even a shadow behind.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"You are not going to get rid of me as soon as you expected, Phil," said Georgia, meeting her friend at the door of her room, as she went up-stairs to change her riding-habit.

"Ah, well, I must bear my burdens," returned Phillis. "But what do you mean? Your aunt would never consent to go away and leave you here."

"She is obliged to stop and play nurse. Mrs. Mayford has sprained her ankle."

"Oh, the poor soul! And how is she ever to manage to keep still? Is she badly hurt?"

"The doctor says she must not leave her bed—or at least her sofa—for ten days," Georgia replied. "But come in while I dress, and I will tell you all about it."

Phillis followed her into the chamber and sat down, divided between conflicting reflections,—sympathy for Mrs. Mayford, for she could never hear of any creature suffering without feeling that; pleasure at the idea of keeping Georgia still longer; and a quick recollection that Maurice Peyton would remain also,—a recollection which disturbed her greatly.

Georgia, busy with her toilet, did not notice Phillis's troubled face. Her eyes shone with a restless light, and two deep lines traced themselves between her brows, as was always the case

when she was thinking deeply, but her stern habits of self-control enabled her to listen to Georgia's remarks and reply without any appearance of being occupied by any thought outside their conversation.

They pitied Mrs. Mayford, indulged in regret for the trials which awaited Aunt Conyngham, and then Georgia observed,—

“But you haven't said you are glad to keep me, Phil.”

“I don't think I need: you know!”

Miss Grosvenor had finished dressing by this time; she crossed the room, laid her hands on Phillis's shoulders: stooped, and kissed her forehead: it felt hot and feverish.

“You don't look well!” she exclaimed. “You are pale, only just two tiny red spots burning in your cheeks.”

“I'm a little tired, perhaps; then, too, I have been over to see Mrs. Plummer again.”

“The poor woman! And the funeral is to-morrow? At least it must be a little comfort to her to think that her money troubles are settled. Maurice told me that he and Denis were going to-day to see the man who holds the mortgage.”

“Mr. Peyton has been very kind,” Phillis said.

“Oh, giving money is nothing,” replied Georgia; “but he is kind,—good and generous, and thoughtful too, as few young men would be whom life has petted as it has him.”

Phillis wanted no serious discussion in regard to Maurice; just at this moment she could not bear it. She roused herself to say, in her lightest bantering tone,—

“Don't wax energetic, my dear. I've no idea of disputing the youth's perfections.”

“He would be out of place in this world if he were perfect.”

“If we find him in danger of becoming so, we can gently chloroform him into a higher and a better sphere,” interrupted Phillis.

“Oh, you inveterate joker! I am sure you laugh at him enough: you need not laugh about him.”

“I can't imagine ever speaking seriously of him or to him,” replied Phillis. Yet she knew her assertion lacked truth: it might have been true a fortnight back, but it was not now.

A speech like this always gratified Georgia. Having no faith in Maurice's powers of constancy, she liked now and then to be assured by Phillis's words or manner that to her this ac-

quaintance was merely friendly, his gallant attention only a pastime.

Yet she wondered, as she had often done, that Phillis had not been deeply attracted by this handsome, elegant creature, and again her odd remark, more than once uttered, that there was something which would keep her from loving any man, recurred to Georgia's mind. She stood leaning her hand on Phillis's shoulder, gazing absently out of the window. Her own perplexities and troubles suddenly started up, and she sighed heavily.

"You are tired too," said Phillis: "you have ridden too hard."

"Yes, I dare say," she replied. Just then, through the open casement, floated the sound of Maurice's voice, speaking to grandma. "There is that bad brother of mine," continued Georgia. "I must go down and tell him of Mrs. Mayford's accident."

"But it need make no difference about his departure," said Phillis. "I don't suppose he will feel it necessary to stop and nurse the gentle widow."

"Do you want him to go?" Georgia asked, turning quickly towards her.

How Phillis longed to answer in the affirmative! but she dared not: it would be a confession of weakness which she would have died rather than utter.

"You are the goosiest goose alive!" cried she. "Am I likely to want either of you to desert us?"

Maurice put an end to the conversation by calling from the porch,—

"Do you young women mean to stop up-stairs all day? A pretty way to treat a visitor! Cinders has just summoned grandma to a consultation, and here I am left like the last rose of summer, with nobody to admire my loveliness."

"Come down, Phil," said Georgia.

"Presently," she answered; "I have something to do first."

Phillis went to her own room, and Georgia descended the stairs, meeting her brother in the hall.

"What's this grandma tells me?" he asked. "The Mayford has hurt her aukle, and the aunt has to stop and take care of her?"

"Yes," Georgia said. A sudden idea seized her. Aunt

Conyngham could not refuse to let her go away if Maurice insisted upon leaving and having her society.

"Well, it's hard lines on the aunt," observed Maurice, glancing up the staircase as he spoke, to see if there was no sign of Phillis.

He had had a disappointment. Knowing that Phillis was to go to Mrs. Plummer's that morning, he waited down by the lake, certain she would pass that way,—waited more than an hour; and then Joe Grimshaw appeared on his road to the post-office, and informed the watcher that Miss French had already been to Mrs. Plummer's, and had driven home with Farmer Petherick, who found her there.

Joe mentioned the circumstance casually, as if he had no idea with what purpose the young gentleman was loitering in the wood; but, though Maurice paid no attention to the remark, and only said, "Hurry up, Joe, and bring my letters and Miss Grosvenor's to the Nest," the boy perceived that he was disappointed.

"He's as fond of her as a fly is of honey. I wonder if she likes him. Folks allays said she'd marry Denis Bourke, but, hokey pokey! you can't never tell what a gall 'ull do," Joe meditated, with a reckless expenditure of negatives, and a wisdom beyond his years. "It's my opinion Miss Grosvenor has ketched Bourke. But then there's the city chap! I can't seem to fix it straight noway; but them that lives will see."

Joe passed on, whistling philosophically, and Peyton followed in his wake towards the Nest.

"Maurice," said Georgia, "there is no reason why you and I should wait. Mrs. Mayford would not accept my assistance, and aunt will be so occupied for a week that we shall see very little of her."

"Why, where should we go? You wouldn't want to stay alone in the town house," returned Maurice, discontentedly.

"But we might make a journey in some direction."

"Oh, it is too late in the season; the weather may break up any day now. Besides, the aunt wouldn't like our deserting her; and, indeed, it wouldn't be right; just think a moment, and you will see that!" said Maurice, with an access of virtuous care for others which sat as easily upon him as if such burden had been long familiar.

Georgia could not help smiling at this exhibition of primitive Christian charity, yet she hated to give up her one means of escaping the perils of Denis Bourke's society and her own folly. She could not tell her brother why she wished to fly; she would have no fresh confidant. She knew that she should never change, never yield to Bourke's persistence; she should conquer,—live down her foolish dream, as Mr. Caruthers predicted. It was enough that she had been forced to let him participate in her secret; no other human being, not even Maurice, should share it.

"But if aunt didn't object?" she pleaded.

"She would. Even if she consented, she would feel terribly hurt. Really, Georgia, I am surprised at your thinking of leaving her," rejoined Maurice, his air of virtue increasing till it became quite majestic.

Georgia burst out laughing.

"You are too absurd!" cried she. "So you are not discouraged yet? I should think your complete failure in trying to flirt with Phil would have worn out your patience; you must have purchased a new stock."

"And an inexhaustible one," returned he.

He laughed, but his tone was serious enough to strike Georgia.

"Why, Maurice, if you were anybody else, I should think you in earnest!" she exclaimed.

"Very well; you can think I am 'anybody else,' if you like," he replied, carelessly.

Grandma came out at the moment, and interrupted their conversation. She was quite talkative, for her,—divided between sympathy for Mrs. Mayford's misfortune, and pleasure at the thought of Miss Grosvenor's departure being deferred.

"Phillis and I hardly dared to think about it when the time for your going seemed so near," she observed.

"Ah, grandma, you have spoiled me dreadfully," answered Georgia, leading her to her favorite easy-chair in the porch, beside which stood a table, whereon her book and knitting were already placed.

"I want some of the spoiling myself; Georgia sha'n't claim it all," said Maurice, bending over her.

The old lady looked from one face to the other, with her tender, *wistful smile*.

"You really are a very handsome pair," she said, "and you are very kind. Few young people would always remember an old woman as you do."

"Phillis sets too good an example for us not to follow it," said Georgia; "and then, you know, we both love you, grandma."

After a little talk, Maurice began to fidget. Finally he asked,—

"But where is Miss French?"

"She is busy; she will be down presently," replied Georgia, who, even while conversing, had been thinking of Maurice's looks and words before the old lady appeared. If he was really in earnest at last!—if he loved Phillis! The thought was very pleasant to Georgia. And could Phil be brought to care? Surely, yes. Maurice always succeeded in what he set his heart upon having. Then the idea of a secret in Phillis's life recurred to Georgia, but she put it by; probably it only existed in her own fancy. Maurice and Phillis—she liked to join their names: if only Maurice could be sure of himself! But Phillis was to have consoled Denis Bourke; that had been Georgia's plan; and—

Here she became conscious that her meditations were growing foolish, and resolutely fastened her mind on the conversation.

In the mean time, Phillis was sitting in her own room, not even making a pretence of employment,—sitting with her hands clasped over her knees, her head resting against the back of her chair, looking tired, worn, and exceedingly impatient.

"I wish Maurice hadn't heard what Miranda said," her reflections ran: "it will give him such a chance to say silly things. Of course it's all folly; he doesn't care really; it is only because he can't find that he has produced any impression on me. And the worst of it is, I care!—I do! I wouldn't have thought I could be such a fool, when I know so well that if he loved me ever so dearly it would be no use—no use! I didn't know I cared till the other night; somehow what the poor child said forced me to feel it. How could I be so absurd, so idiotic, with a gulf deep as the grave between his pride and me,—with—fancy my telling him! and—"

She broke off in her reverie, and began pacing up and down

the room, in a state of feverish excitement, which even her strong will could not subdue.

"Life is very hard; there is no use in trying to disguise that fact," she thought, unable to get her reflections further away from the channel into which they had drifted than these bitter murmurs against existence. "I never did anything really wicked: why should I be punished? Religious people say it will all be made clear hereafter,—that we shall be thankful for all our troubles here. I think that is about the weakest article of faith that theology ever bound up into its huge bundle of inconsistencies! Future happiness won't fill the blank; besides, if we are never granted any happiness in this sphere, there is no logical reason for supposing we shall be more kindly treated in another! Then the parsons say we must not reason,—faith is what we must have: that being the case, why did we have reason given to us? They say that in the face of our very worst trouble, and it sounds fiendish,—yes, it does!"

Here she was interrupted by a tap at the door.

"Oh! who is knocking? I wish I could be let alone!" Then she called, "I can't come down yet, Georgia," supposing that Maurice had sent his sister up to fetch her.

"I ain't aweer that anybody asks you to, Miss Phillis, and 'tain't no use conversin' with no Georgia whatumever when she ain't here," responded a voice which Phillis could not fail to recognize.

Ah! she did not object to seeing Ann Raines; she was in a silly mood, and solitude bad for her! Ann Raines represented the commonplace, work-a-day side of existence: let her enter by all means! Whether she wished to talk about the new counterpanes, or house-cleaning, or whatever subject, it could not fail to be something which would put fancy and imagination to flight.

"Come in, come in," she said, hastily catching up some dress stuff that lay on the bed, and beginning to fold it, as if reflection in regard to a new gown had occupied her.

"Did you say come in?" demanded Miss Raines, evidently speaking with her mouth at the keyhole, for her voice sounded choked and difficult.

"Yes!" cried Phillis.

"Hey?" questioned Miss Raines, unintentionally exasper-

ating. Phillis crossed the room, and opened the door with such suddenness that Miss Raines nearly fell over the threshold. "Land's sake! I thought the side of the house had fell in!" she exclaimed.

"I had answered you twice," said Phillis, controlling her impatience and speaking with perfect good humor.

"Wall, if it comes to that, I'd asked you twice," replied Miss Raines, recovering her equilibrium. "I didn't hear, and I don't go a-pokin' my nose about till I know it's wanted. You might ha' ben a-washin', or huntin' a flea, or sumpting, for all I could tell."

"But, now that you are here,—you and your nose,—what do you want, Ann Raines?"

"'Tain't a pooty one, and I know it; but I should look funny comin' without it," observed the spinster, putting a lean finger to the organ in question, as if to be sure it was there. "There's a great deal of *character* in noses, Miss Phillis; natur' she manages wonderfully. You couldn't change 'em about and make any improvement in folkses faces."

"I dare say not! But what brought you, Ann?"

"Wall, I wasn't a-comin'. Maria Jenkins she's a-settin' with Miss Plummer, and I'd fixed up to home, so I thought I'd walk over to Wachuset, and then when I got here I allowed I'd step in and see what you said about my beginnin' that quilt next week."

"I wish you would!" Phillis replied, going back to the bed and taking up the dress-lengths again.

"That's a very pretty blue," said Miss Raines, in the tone of a *connoisseur*, "but I like green better."

She wore a gown of the color she admired, a shawl of various discordant tints, and a marvellous hat, with a whole bird on it, which stirred every time she moved her head, as if anxious to escape; it looked vicious, too, as though inclined to bite unless allowed to carry out its desire.

"You are very gorgeous to-day, Ann," said Phillis.

"Oh, nothin' to speak of," returned the spinster, regarding herself in the mirror with a satisfied smirk. "As I was a comin' through the hall, I see Miss Georgia and her brother on the porch with your grandma: Mr. Peeton he had to stop me to joke. What a fellow he is!"

"A man who has nothing to do but amuse himself can

joke very easily, I should think," said Phillis, with a sudden bitterness, growing out of her recent reflections on the unsatisfactoriness of existence to so many pilgrims.

"I expect he's awful rich," said Miss Raines: "and he's a picturful creeter to look at, and no more stuck up'n Miss Georgia; though when you first see 'm, a body would think the ground wasn't good enough for 'em to walk on; but, law! they ain't a mite!"

"I'm afraid you have a weakness for Mr. Peyton. I shall tell your old admirer, Mr. Waters," said Phillis. "And now I must go down and speak to Ninny."

"How you do tease a body!" cried Miss Raines, bridling. "Wall, I guess 'tain't hard to see who Mr. Peeton likes. Land's sake! Ef you'd seen how pleased he looked when I let out what Mirandy said!"

The old maid stopped in dire confusion, and shrank under the stern glance Miss French fixed upon her.

"So you told Mr. Peyton!" she exclaimed. "After promising me that you would not!"

"I swarn to man, Miss Phillis, I could ha' cut my tongue out I was so sorry," pleaded Ann, puckering up her face as if about to weep. "I was that upshot by poor Mirandy's dyin' I didn't know what I was about, and he asked me questions, and out that popped before I thought."

A wave of vivid color had swept over Phillis's cheeks, and left her paler than before.

"It is of no consequence," she said. "I was only afraid it might disturb him to hear that—"

"I didn't know what it was, and I said so; you hain't told me yit," broke in the spinster. "Anyhow, he didn't look disturbed, I can tell you."

She forgot her fear of reproof in curiosity, and nodded her head till the bird seemed alive and just ready to nip the end of her nose. Phillis wished devoutly that it could.

This message from the dying child would certainly be made use of by Maurice to turn their first private conversation upon serious matters; she could not bear that at present.

"When are you coming back from Wachuset, Ann?" she asked, seized with a sudden idea.

"Oh! I do' no—it's a off day with me: mabby I'll step in to see Miss Winston,—she 'twas Corneily Jones, you know,—"

and then I want to do a little tradin', and, if I can, ketch a ride back towards evenin'."

"Stop till afternoon, and I will drive you over," said Phillis. "I want to put the store-room in order, and Cinders is too busy to help."

"Oh, wait till to-morrow," urged the spinster, disliking to relinquish her proposed holiday. "I'll do it up to the handle for you, ef you will!"

"I mean it to be done to-day," said Phillis: "if you would rather go to Wachuset and spend money, instead of stopping here to earn some, why, you must, of course."

"But I shall spile my frock," expostulated Miss Raines, yielding a little at the thought of money, for she was parsimonious, and dearly loved to add stray shillings to her hoard.

"You've a black petticoat on," said Phillis, as the spinster lifted her gown in her energy. "Take off your dress: I will give you a jacket to put on. I must do that store-room. Don't be disobliging, Ann. I'll pay you for a half-day's work."

"Ef I must, I must," replied the old maid, removing her hat. "Fetch in your jacket, Miss Phillis. I ain't one to run in the face o' Providence by shirkin' work. But you needn't come. I know jist how you like things. Go off to the company, and you see if I hain't got it all fixed up square by dinner-time."

"No; I want to sort my garden-seeds: there is a great deal I must do myself," said Phillis.

Work,—real physical work,—that was the thing for her in her present mood. Was she to sit down and fold her hands, and brood and fret like a fine lady? Not a bit of it. She was P. French,—farmer, dairy-woman, boarding-house-keeper. She had been indulging too much of late in idleness. If she wanted poetry, she must find it in occupation: to work! to work!

So it came about that when Maurice, losing patience, persuaded his sister to go in search of Miss French, Georgia hunted her high and low, and at last found her with her head in a drawer of the store-room press, while Ann Raines, perched on the top of a step-ladder, was brushing the shelves which stretched across one end of the room.

"Can't stir: sha'n't have finished till dinner-time," was all the answer Georgia got to her entreaties. "You'd better run away; you will be covered with dust."

Maurice was forced to take his departure without seeing Phillis, and when he came back in the afternoon she had driven over to Wachusett and taken Miss Raines with her.

However, Peyton did not allow disappointment to render him cross: he remained with grandma and Georgia, took a walk with his sister, and lingered till tea-time in the confident expectation that Phillis would presently appear. But instead there came Joe Grimshaw, whom Maurice had sent to the town on some errand. He had seen Miss French: she had asked him to stop and tell her grandmother that she should not return till late, as Mrs. Mayford desired her company; but grandma was not to feel uneasy: Ann Raines would come back with her.

CHAPTER XXIX.

It would not be a thing that one could premise as likely often to happen between two men, aspirants for the same woman, that they should retain a sincere liking for each other, but it did occur in the case of Mr. Caruthers and Denis Bourke.

Something, no doubt, was attributable to the fact that each believed that in the end he should triumph, and could afford to show generosity towards his rival, but much more must be ascribed to the nobility of their characters.

The negotiations concerning the coal lands in which both were interested would have obliged them to see a good deal of each other, but, so far from confining their intercourse to these business relations, they were often together, and found a mutual pleasure in cultivating the acquaintance.

They held endless discussions, drifting off into arguments upon every possible subject, from ethics to metaphysics, and contriving to differ radically in almost all things without growing acrimonious, never indeed separating after one of their wordy combats without each feeling his respect for his antagonist increased.

Mr. Caruthers still believed that Bourke's plans could only result in failure and loss of money, though he was obliged to admit that in the young man he had met that *rara avis*, a theorist capable of being practical in the attempt to reduce his ideas to useful working form.

A few days after Georgia's conversation with Mr. Caruthers, the two gentlemen rode upon some business to a place a number of miles off along one of the wildest of the mountain roads. They got belated, missed their way, and a violent storm, which burst over their heads without warning, retarded them still further. Luckily, they found themselves within reach of a small country inn, where they had supper and were made sufficiently comfortable. The evening was so far advanced when the tempest ceased, and the night so dark, that they decided to remain until morning, as Bourke knew the landlord was correct in his assurances that a torrent which crossed the road a mile below the house would be so swollen by the rain that they must go a long distance out of their course, and the probabilities were that in the darkness they would again miss their route.

They spent a pleasant evening, however, and sat talking until late, theorizing and arguing in their usual fashion. Up to this time there had been one thing, and one only, which showed a mutual consciousness of the peculiar relations in which they stood: any mention of Georgia Grosvenor was carefully avoided. How it happened that to-night her name gained a place in the conversation, perhaps neither could have told; but it did so, and Mr. Caruthers determined to take advantage of this opportunity to establish an entire frankness between Bourke and himself,—a result he had been meditating for several days.

"We have at last hit on a subject of conversation where we are not likely to disagree, at least in regard to the esteem and admiration which the lady merits," he said, with a smile.

"Well, no, there could not well be two opinions concerning that," Denis answered, meeting the other's glance with a smile as open and good-natured as that which he received.

They sat in silence for a little, Mr. Caruthers gazing thoughtfully into the fire, and Denis watching the wreaths of smoke that curled above his head from the pipe he smoked in preference to the Havana, choice as it was, which his companion had offered him.

At last Mr. Caruthers turned towards him again, and said, with an abruptness more in keeping with Denis's usual manner than his own,—

"What are you thinking so deeply about, Bourke?"

Denis roused himself with a start; his fancies had floated

off into a vague revery, concerning which he could only have told that Georgia Grosvenor had been its object.

"Upon my word, I hardly know," he said; "in fact, I believe I was not thinking at all."

"Dreaming, then," amended Mr. Caruthers. "Ah, in that your age has the advantage of mine; you can still dream, and hope to see the visions become a reality."

"I mean that some of them shall, at all events," Bourke said, firmly, yet without anything aggressive in his tone, though he could not help thinking his companion's words held in some way a reference to Miss Grosvenor; but he knew Caruthers too well to suspect that they were meant to be mocking or a rebuke.

"And you are a very determined man, so the intention carries a weight with it which it would not have, coming from most people," Mr. Caruthers observed. "I should say you had never in your life given up anything you had set your mind on; now, frankly, am I not right?"

"I believe I never did," Bourke replied; "but that is not saying I have always succeeded."

"Ah, well, even the strongest will is not omnipotent," Caruthers said, pleasantly.

"Luckily for the rest of the human race who would have to live in the same world with it," returned Bourke.

"And the persons with whom the carrying out your will brings you into opposition,—do you hate them as bitterly as is the habit of most determined people?" Mr. Caruthers asked.

"I don't think I am a good hater," Bourke answered. "I am frank and blunt, and I despise underhandedness and trickery, but if a man is honest and above-board I believe I like him the better for being able to fight his battle well."

"I agree with you; even if one is to be conquered, one likes to know that one was beaten by a worthy antagonist."

"And would feel a respect in proportion to his strength," said Bourke.

"There come battles sometimes where the issue does not entirely depend on the prowess of the opponents," Mr. Caruthers said.

"Often, no doubt; but I don't follow your thought: give me an instance, as an example of what you mean," rejoined Bourke.

"I don't know that I could offer a better than our own case,—the battle that is going on between you and me," said Mr. Caruthers, with perfect composure. "We are each trying to win the same woman, and each is aware of the other's intention."

"Yes," Bourke assented, wondering a little what would come next, for certainly the example which Mr. Caruthers had given of his meaning was rather startling, though his listener liked the frankness it displayed.

"And the issues lie beyond the control of your will or mine," continued Mr. Caruthers.

"Most decidedly."

"But I believe we are both able to hope that, whatever the personal disappointment to either, the end may be what will bring the surest chance of happiness to the lady we so highly esteem."

"Else we should show ourselves a pair of selfish brutes," said Bourke.

"Hardly so bad as that, perhaps," returned Mr. Caruthers. "indeed, I rather flatter myself that we display a slight superiority to the generality of our sex in being capable of feeling as we do."

"Anyway, that's a comfortable fashion of looking at the matter," said Bourke, laughing.

"Oh, I never see any reason for false modesty. A man ought to form a just estimate of his own character, and give himself the same credit for good motives that he does blame for bad ones."

"But you are able to go further, and give other people the same credit," said Bourke.

"And so are you."

"I hope so."

"Very well, then, the struggle between us assumes a different character from what it would in the case of many men," said Mr. Caruthers. "I think we can regard each other without prejudice,—not let our wishes interfere with our opinions."

"I am sure we can and do," replied Bourke, warmly; then, in spite of himself, he smiled.

"Well?" asked Mr. Caruthers, who was looking at him.

"What did I smile at, you mean?"

"I was wondering if any other two men ever fell to discussing the special subject we have fallen on in the same way,—I mean two men placed in the position towards each other in which we find ourselves."

"But don't you think it is well to do it? We have not known each other very long, but I believe we have an honest mutual liking; at least I can speak for my side."

"And I for mine," said Bourke, and they shook hands across the table which stood between them.

"I have been meaning for several days to speak," continued Mr. Caruthers: "it seemed to me better that we should both show ourselves as frank in regard to this matter as we do in everything else."

"You are perfectly right: there is nothing more unpleasant than to feel there is some subject that must be carefully avoided with a person whom one sees daily," Bourke answered.

"I felt certain you would look at the matter in that way, and so"—he smiled here in his gravely pensive fashion—"I determined to take advantage of my being an elderly fellow and you a young one, to speak out frankly."

"I should dispute the adjective, only it might seem as if I thought you fishing for a compliment," said Bourke.

"I am forty-two," returned Mr. Caruthers, with that pensive smile still on his lips. "You see, if we are to count by actual years, I might be Miss Grosvenor's father."

"It is no matter about the years: you are in the very prime of life,—all the energy of seven-and-twenty and a matured judgment, which leaves the advantage on your side."

"Forty-two," repeated Mr. Caruthers, slowly. "Bourke, a man falls in love at your time of life; he glides into it at mine. I did not myself know until lately how deep my affection for Miss Grosvenor had become; it might still seem too calm a sentiment to satisfy many women in their early youth; but she used to think that anything beyond esteem would be unsuited to her character and wishes."

"I think," said Bourke, "that, clever as she is, she knows very little about herself as yet."

"Very little," Mr. Caruthers echoed. After a pause, he added, "do you know what has taken place between us since I came here?"

"No."

"Then I will tell you. I mean everything to be clearly understood between us. I consider it only justice to her."

"I fancy your ideas of justice involve a good deal of generosity," said Bourke. "Go on: I am listening."

"I had asked her months ago to marry me; she was to reflect and give me an answer this autumn; but that you knew."

"Yes, I knew that."

"Well, she gave me my answer not very long since."

Bourke's heart sank. The man spoke so calmly, in a tone so free from disappointment, that, in spite of what he had said before, Denis could not help a quick fear.

"She told me that she could not marry me," Mr. Caruthers went on, in the same slow, meditative voice.

"Then I suppose that settled the matter," cried Denis, his heart giving a second bound, but of hope and pleasure this time. Then he reflected that the words he had involuntarily uttered must sound cruel, fairly insolent, and he said, quickly, "I beg your pardon; that was a brutal speech; but I did not mean it to be."

"It was a very natural one," Caruthers replied. "But you are mistaken: it did not in the least settle the matter."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Denis, staring at him with wide-open eyes, then was obliged to add once more, "Hang it, I beg your pardon again; I'm worse than a bumble-bee for blundering."

"Did not in the least settle it!" repeated Mr. Caruthers. "Come, don't be astonished: take the matter home. If she refused you to-morrow, would you give in?"

"She won't hear me talk at all; at least—"

"Well, then, we are in the same predicament; for if I were to talk to her about becoming my wife, she would not listen to me either," said Mr. Caruthers. "But you don't mean to give in?"

"I do not."

"And I do not. Come, it is all out now. Rivals, but not foes?" he said, inquiringly.

"Never foes, assuredly."

"Friends, I hope?"

"Friends!" and again their hands met across the table, as they looked steadily into each other's eyes.

"Good. Whichever way it ends, the disappointed suitor can have the satisfaction of feeling that the woman he cared for was won by an honest man."

"I think, if any third person could have a frank answer from the lady, he would hear that she had no intention but that of leaving us to be disappointed together," observed Denis, a little gruffly, speaking from one of those sudden impulses of discouragement which will occasionally seize a man in love.

"I agree with you there," said Caruthers; "but you know that is the one point in my favor: so I regard it differently from you."

"Everything is in your favor," cried Denis; "unless—unless—"

"She finds that she really loves you," said Caruthers, finishing his sentence for him.

"It would have to go pretty deep to overbalance what she calls reason;—what I call the effects of a false education," said Denis, in the same rather grumbling tone.

"That part of the subject would lead us into one of our endless arguments,—away off from the point in hand," returned Mr. Caruthers.

"Oh, yes, we should never agree."

"Well, we have been perfectly frank, each knows just where he stands in regard to the other."

"Upon my word, Caruthers, you're a capital fellow," cried Denis, enthusiastically. "I don't believe one man in a thousand would behave as you do."

"And not many would receive my explanations as you have done. Do you know I've an idea it is getting late?"

An examination of their watches proved that he was right.

"Nearly one o'clock," said Denis; and we must start rather early."

Their bedrooms adjoined the little parlor where they sat, so they could retire to rest without disturbing anybody, though the entire stillness proved that the household had gone to bed and did not propose to be disturbed on any terms.

The next day dawned bright and clear, and the pair rode homeward in the best possible disposition towards each other; and certainly, if Miss Grosvenor could have heard their conversation of the preceding night, she must have decided that

two more original wooers never fell to the lot of woman, and would have felt sorely exasperated by the persistent determination both had so frankly admitted.

CHAPTER XXX.

LITTLE Miranda had been buried over a week; Mrs. Mayford's ankle was getting well as fast as her impatience and imprudence would allow it to, and, in outward seeming, life passed tranquilly enough with the group of friends whose experiences I am chronicling.

Maurice Peyton could not flatter himself that he had gained ground with Phillis, for if one hour he tried to hope that at least she had begun to believe in his sincerity, she never failed to destroy his illusion the next. To force her down to serious conversation grew daily more difficult. Then, too, in addition to her home duties, which of late appeared unusually engrossing, she paid frequent visits to Mrs. Mayford, who begged importunately for her company, declaring that nobody's talents as nurse could equal hers, and Phillis was amused by her patronizing demonstrations of affection, and listened with innocent meekness to her hints against Peyton.

But a general discomfort reigned under this exterior quiet. The invalid tormented Mrs. Conyngham a great deal; Mr. Caruthers was by no means happy; Georgia continued in a state of constant excitement; and the days were far from peaceful to Phillis and Denis Bourke.

Only grandma remained unchanged,—tranquil and sunny as the soft Indian-summer weather, which showed no signs of relaxing its dominion, increasing in beauty with each fresh day.

Phillis had been one afternoon to inquire after Mrs. Plummer, and when she reached Bourke's gate on her way home she concluded to shorten her walk by passing through his grounds and taking the wood-path. She went round the house and came out by the kitchen, just in time to interrupt a difference of opinion between Miss Raines and Joe Grimshaw, which threatened to grow serious. Mistress Tabitha had hurt her

wrist, and had called in the antique virgin to wash some white counterpanes, previous to their being put aside in lavender for the winter. Miss Raines, having completed the lavatory process, had pressed Joe Grimshaw into service to help wring the unwieldy articles dry from the last rinsing water, and though Joe did not venture to refuse, as Bourke had told him he must assist, he considered the occupation derogatory to his masculine dignity, and proceeded to tease Miss Raines, by way of a little relief to his feelings.

Twice he dropped his end of the counterpane, obliging Miss Raines to put it back into what she termed "the bluing-tub." Her indignation was further increased by having spattered her stockings, a misfortune which she acrimoniously declared the result of an intentional "flop of the quilt" on wicked Joe's part, and, though he vehemently denied the charge, the twinkle in his eyes proved that, if not absolutely guilty, he was far from experiencing the remorse for the accident which Miss Raines deemed fitting.

"You're just a clumsy hugger-mugger, Joe Grimshaw!" she cried. "I never see a man, nor boy neither, that could do a thing straight."

"Wringing bed-quilts ain't work for men-folks, anyhow," said Joe; "and for a female that brags about her faculty as much as you do, Miss Raines, you want more help than anybody I know."

"You little sassy upstart!" rejoined Miss Raines, very red in the face, "don't you dare to call me names agin, else I'll know the reason!"

"Why, your name is Raines, ain't it?" asked Joe, innocently. "Ef you've changed you must ha' ben very secret about it, and women ain't generally that, if so be they're lucky enough to ketch a husband."

"You'll ketch sumptin' as bad if you don't look sharp, my boy," retorted Miss Raines. "A husband!—I'd rather have the measles a good deal!"

"Mabby you'd find them easier to ketch, though it's rather late in the day for you to git even them," muttered Joe.

Miss Raines irately demanded what he had said, but Joe prudently declined to repeat the speech.

"The truth is, you've got so sot up by Mr. Pecton's spilin', that you're ruined," cried the spinster, shaking her head with

as much energy as if it had been a missile which she proposed presently to fling at him. "You go on as you air a-doin', and you'll end on the gallows, not to mention scorchin' arterwards along with Divers and all the rest of the scoffers! I see you last Sunday a-playin' marbles in meetin' under the seat; and if a boy that does that ain't a-gallopin' towards pardition as fast as a horse can trot, then I'm a tinker."

"Why, you wouldn't 'a' had me disturb folks by playing 'em on top of the seat, would you?" asked Joe, with a grin. "Oh, I say, Miss Raines, do stop swabbin' that there quilt round in the water, and let's wring it out and get done."

"It'd have been done a'ready if you hadn't gone cuttin' up your didoes!" retorted the old maid. "Here, ketch a hold of your end now."

Joe immediately seized the tail of his coat in both hands, and inquired, with much earnestness,—

"Am I a-holdin' of it hard enough, Miss Raines?"

"You're an impudent little good-for-nothin'!" cried the virgin. "Ain't you ashamed of yourself, sir? Take a hold of the end of that quilt quicker!"

"Ef that was what you wanted, why didn't you say so?" asked Joe, obeying with a very poor grace.

"Now, don't you spatter my ankles agin, that's all!"

"I ain't done nothin' to your aukles, and I don't want to," replied Joe. "I don't believe they're spattered anyhow; you dassent to show 'em, 'cause you know they ain't. Come, now!"

This time it was Miss Raines who dropped the counterpane, making a rapid movement towards Joseph as she did so.

"You—you young Potiphar!" she exclaimed in wrath and outraged virtue; "I'm a-goin' to do by you what your mother hain't—my dooty. You're a-goin' to git your ears boxed, Joe Grimshaw."

"I'll bet you half a dollar on that," cried Joe, retreating as she advanced, and putting the tub between her and himself. "Now, see here, Miss Raines, you was hired to wash them bed-quilts,—you ain't done it very scrumptious, neither,—and not to go committin' salt and butter on me, and I don't mean to stand it."

At this moment Phillis appeared, and her coming somewhat quieted the belligerents, though both commenced a *voluble recital* of their wrongs. However, Joe speedily yielded

to his admired Miss Phillis's gentle rebuke, and even condescended to inform the spinster that he was "only funnin'," applying himself so vigorously to his duty that her wrath was appeased, and she went so far as to admit that "after all, she s'posed he was about as decent as any creatur' inside a male hide could be."

Phillis stood for a few moments leaning against the side of the well and answering Miss Raines's questions in regard to Mrs. Plummer. Suddenly the spinster exclaimed,—

"Oh, land's sake! ef there don't come Mr. Bourke; and here I be all drabbed, and my dress pinned up. I wish to goodness men-folks would keep away when they ain't wanted!"

She seized the counterpane and ran off, calling to Joe to follow and help her spread it on the grass. Denis had come up the zigzags, and was passing through the garden; he saw Phillis, and turned towards the kitchen, saying, as he approached,—

"I have been down to your house; nobody knew what had become of you."

"What did you want?" she asked, rather wearily, though her face lighted up with a friendly smile.

"Only to tell Mr. Sykes I had got those seeds from the Patent Office," he explained. He was close beside her now, and added, as he looked anxiously in her face, "You look tired, Phillis."

"Yes, I believe I am," she replied. "Somehow, I have been tired for a whole week; and that's unusual with me, you know."

"Come and sit down in the veranda," he said.

"I suppose I ought to be getting home," she answered. "I've a dozen things to do."

"Well, your arrival is expected impatiently enough," he said. "I left Maurice at your house, and very much injured his lordship seemed to feel because you were absent, as he always does if he can't get everything he wants in this world."

"Why, he drove Georgia over to Wachuset. Has she come back?"

"No; she stops till evening; but Maurice said she and the aunt were busy with the invalid, so he decided to return, and go for his sister later."

Phillis appeared to have changed her mind about the neces-

sity for hastening home. She seated herself in the veranda, picked up some knitting which Mistress Tabitha had left there, and began to add to the round of the half-finished stocking.

"I wonder if you could sit idle a moment, Phillis," said Bourke.

"Ah, you and I mustn't allow the society of our fine new friends to make us forget that we belong to the working-class," she answered, smiling, yet her voice was rather bitter.

"That speech doesn't sound like you, P. French!" returned Denis; but, though he smiled too, his voice grew grave.

"No, and it was silly!" she said. "Heigho! I'm stupid to-day."

"I'm afraid you are not very well," he replied.

"Oh, I'm well enough. The truth is, Denis, I've been going about for a week oppressed by a sort of presentiment: you know I'm not given to such folly!"

"No, indeed! But it is very uncalled for now, Phillis: the last letter we got proved that you could put by your anxiety, and it is exactly a week since it came."

"Yet, somehow, I cannot get over the feeling! Of course it means nothing; one never has a warning when trouble is really near; that is just the time one is sure to be in the highest spirits."

"Very often," he said, while his face showed that he was thinking of something else, though the solicitude with which he regarded her proved that she was the object of his thoughts.

"Don't look at me like that, Denis!" she exclaimed, trying to laugh, though her lips quivered. "I feel as Georgia says she does sometimes when she is nervous,—as if I should like to cry! There's nothing the matter, and you ought to scold me instead of looking sorry."

"It would require a very stern judge even to do that with you," he replied. "Phillis, I often wonder if you have the least idea what a brave woman you are,—what a lesson of fortitude and patience your life is!"

"I don't feel very brave lately," she said, with the tremor of repressed tears in her voice. But her habits of self-control were too firmly fixed for her to yield further to the unusual weakness, and after a moment's pause she lifted her head and continued, cheerfully, "Let us talk about something else; one

can't help feeling a little tired and cowardly sometimes, but to dwell upon such thoughts and discuss them is only another way of petting the folly."

"You are the softest woman to other people, and the severest to yourself, that ever lived, I think," he said.

"Life has made it necessary for me to be stern with P. French," she replied, gazing steadily at him; "at present she needs an extra share of sternness."

"Oh, I hope not!" he exclaimed, then paused, hardly venturing to put in words the meaning which her speech took in his mind. Phillis knitted on in silence, and after a pause he said, "It is a long while since we have had one of our old talks."

"It is a long while since anything has been as it used to be," she answered.

"But it has been a very happy summer in many ways, Phillis."

"Perhaps too happy," she said. "Oh, Denis, I wonder if we shall have to live to regret that Georgia ever came here."

"Not I," he replied. "Whatever comes, I shall never be sorry."

"But oh, Denis, it seems hoping against hope when one remembers her bringing up! She's a grand creature, but the shackles that hold her are very strong. You don't mind my saying this? we haven't talked about it; but you must know I see just where you stand."

"Of course," he answered. "Phillis, this is the way I feel. You know when I have made up my mind that a thing is right, I go on, and pay no attention to possible consequences. I am doing that now; if the world and Georgia's false education prove too strong for me, then I must bear my burden; but I cannot call my heart back; I would not if I could."

"She will have to decide for or against before long," said Phillis. "She cannot endure this strain; it is telling very severely on her. I only wonder how her aunt can be so blind to what is going on. As for her brother—well, I know he does see, but you might as well expect a butterfly to think seriously as to look for reflection in Maurice Peyton."

Bourke hesitated an instant, then said,—

"I used to believe so, Phillis, but I begin to perceive that I have underrated Maurice: he has more fixedness of purpose than I gave him credit for."

"Oh, he might show it for a time, when some caprice got possession of him," she replied, almost sharply. "He is like a spoiled child,—always wanting the moon because it is out of his reach; let him get it, and he'd fling it away like a football half an hour afterwards."

"No, no! A month ago I might have agreed with you, but I have learned his character better: that is not just."

"Well, I know it is not, and that is exactly what makes me so savage and bitter!" she exclaimed, dropping her work, and looking at him with frightened eyes. "I tried to believe it as long as I could, but that night little Miranda died I had to be convinced."

"Yes, he told me," Bourke answered: "he never had talked freely to me before, but he was so excited he could not keep silence. Not that he knows you are convinced at last; he is in earnest; he has grown so humble, poor fellow, that he scarcely dares hope."

"And he never shall know!" cried Phillis, firmly, though her voice began to tremble again as she added, "Oh, I wish he would go away! I am tired. I want to rest. I wish he would go!"

"I suppose he must," Bourke said, sadly. "I'm afraid there is nothing else to be done; and yet—he is so different in many ways from what I knew, or he either,—he has developed so many new, sterling qualities since his whole soul has got awake,—that sometimes I wonder—"

"Denis, you must be mad!" she broke in, passionately. "Admit that he loves me!"

"And he does, Phillis. I never saw love work so radical a change in a man."

"No radical change; the leopard can't lose his spots!" she cried, with a strange mingling of bitterness, terror, and pain in her tones. "There is one thing stronger than his heart,—his pride. Why, you know as well as I do that if I were to tell him the truth he would go away to the ends of the earth rather than see me again. His love would seem such a shame to him that if he had ten hearts he would break them all rather than give that love an instant's shelter."

"I—I am afraid so," Bourke said. "All the fault of his bringing up. Oh, it is terrible to see the effect of false education and the damnable doctrines of what people call the

world on two such natures as his and Georgia's! But she is less hurt than she believes; it may be so with him, Phillis."

"Whether it be or not, you and I will never have the opportunity of finding out," she answered, sternly.

"You mean you would never give him the chance of proving whether he was really superior to the wrong influences of his life, the belittling, pernicious effects of his pride?"

"Of course I mean that. While a doubt remains that his pride would conquer, do you think I would tell him a word,—give him a chance to decide?—I? No, no, Denis, never! He may stay or he may go, but he will never have an opportunity to pity P. French."

"And yet—and yet—oh, you may be wronging him, Phillis! He is so different from what we thought; he might bear even that test."

"He will never be called on to do so," she answered, her voice suddenly growing quiet and low, sounding the more inflexible from that very gentleness. "Neither he nor any man, Denis; my secret and I are married to each other; there's no place for love to find lodging. If ever I had a heart to give,—I mean as women give theirs to men,—my secret filled it up long ago."

Bourke stood regarding her with a troubled countenance, full of tenderness and yearning sympathy, longing to speak, yet unable to find a word which would not carry a sting instead of the comfort he wanted to offer. His back was turned towards the garden, but Phillis, looking out across the brow of the hill, said, suddenly,—

"Mr. Peyton is coming."

"Has he seen you? Do you want to get away?" Denis asked, fearful that to meet Maurice just now would be too hard a trial even for her wonderful strength.

She glanced at him with a proud smile.

"P. French is like the Old Guard,—she never surrenders!" was her answer. She sat calmly awaiting Maurice's approach, and, as he reached the veranda, said, gayly, "When a lady comes to visit you, Mr. Peyton, it would be more polite to stop at home to receive her! Suppose we all three drive over to Wachusett and release Georgia! Denis Bourke looks rather like a dragon-killer to-day, and you can serve as trou-

badour, and chant his triumphs after he has rescued the damsel."

Her suggestion of driving to the town was carried into effect; and never had Denis seen her gayer, or Maurice her more bewitchingly impervious to sentiment, and, in too high spirits to despond, he could not help again convince himself that it was useless to hope he had made any perceptible progress in his great work: Phillis French still loved him, "and passed on, in maiden meditation fancy free

CHAPTER XXXI.

THAT night there was a men's dinner given by one of the directors of the coal company, to which even Maurice descended to go. Georgia and Phillis French had another evening, and Miss Grosvenor was forced to admit that the last few days fate had kindly interposed in various ways to afford her a good deal of time for rest, if only she had been sensible enough to take advantage of it. But rest she could not; come to any clear decision she could not. She believed she meant to crush all hope in Denis Bourke's mind as usually as she trusted she had done in that of Mr. Carleton; but the importunacy of her pretty dream militated against all efforts. She still called it a dream,—an imaginary romance; but it was very, very sweet; and when she struggled against its potency her heart ached and cried out for relief, to prove that it held its part therein. No girl had ever before found a place in her soul, and this not only increased the charm, bitterly as she upbraided the folly of indulging after girlhood in romantic fancies, fitting at times and which, when they came then, died a natural death under the strong light of reality, and left no pain behind.

All the while she knew she was cheating herself; she knew that she loved this man, with whom she had been brought into such familiar intercourse during the past long, past months; but she would not yield to the belief that she was capable of love in its full significance, of the mighty love which transforms the whole character and renders sacri-

the object beloved a blessed boon. The next morning Georgia went as usual to visit her aunt, and saw Mr. Caruthers. They had a cheerful conversation, undisturbed by any approach to topics which could have troubled her, and when she got back to the Nest, late in the afternoon, there was Denis Bourke waiting for her, in one of his most conversational moods, building up beautiful theories which she combated with all her might, declaring them fit only for the millennium, if ever that apocryphal season should arrive.

"The carrying them out among men would help forward the millennium," Bourke persisted.

"On the whole," said Georgia, "I don't think I should enjoy that perfect peace and quiet: it would be stagnation."

"It would be action and work in their highest and noblest form," returned Denis.

"I don't think I am capable of appreciating anything when it gets so terribly sublimated," Georgia averred. "I am of the earth, earthy. I can understand when anybody talks to me about wanting wealth and honors, but the general-brotherhood doctrine is beyond me. I couldn't even go far enough therein to be willing to let another woman have as pretty a gown as myself."

"You are not speaking from your soul," cried Denis, hotly.

"Well, I am from my vanity, and that is much more powerful," retorted she.

"It is wrong—it is unworthy to talk so!"

"In your opinion, you mean."

"There they go, full tilt!" cried Phillis, clapping her hands in delight. "Now listen, and improve your mind, Mr. Peyton."

Maurice was lying lazily at full length on the turf, while the rest sat respectably in comfortable easy-chairs.

"It may be a discussion of fine theories," he said, brushing away a handful of dandelion-blossoms which Phillis flung over his face; "but if you and I were to talk in that way, Miss French, I am inclined to think these philosophers would call it uncommonly like quarrelling."

"Well," said Phillis, "it has one merit their conversation don't often possess: I can comprehend what they mean; and when they get to Comte and the rest of their fellow-geniuses, I am lost,—drowned,—despairing."

"If you'll come out into the garden I'll read De Musset to you, and we'll forget them and their wisdom," urged Maurice, always on the watch for pretexts to get her society to himself.

"I'm not going to listen to De Musset any more," replied Phillis. "I mentioned him only yesterday to Mrs. Mayford, and she declared that no proper-behaved young woman would ever dream of admitting his acquaintance."

"Did you tell her she was a cadaverous donkey?"

"I couldn't, for I'd never heard of one! But I laid the blame of my knowledge on you."

"And she said—?"

"That it was just what she should have expected of you," cooed Phillis. "She gave me a long lecture on my duty,—on the danger of being deluded by a man in a position above mine—"

"Phil, she did not dare!" broke in Georgia, indignantly.

"Indeed she did," returned Phillis, with one of her ecstatic shakes. "She said—but very politely—that I must not forget who and what I was, though destiny had kindly permitted me to associate for a little with ladies and gentlemen—"

"Nonsense! You are making it up!" growled Maurice.

"No; she did not consider it a kindness; she was afraid it might prove a misfortune," pursued Phillis,—"*bring me great unhappiness, unless I wisely followed her advice. She said the lady's friendship for me would prove only a caprice: that was you, G. G.*"

"There never was so vulgar, detestable a woman!" cried Georgia.

"She said the gentleman wanted to break a country heart before he went to town: that was you, Mr. P.!" continued Phillis, saluting Peyton with a fresh shower of dandelions.

"She's not very wise if she has failed to discover that you have none," retorted Maurice.

"She said I had better be humble and meek, and beg a certain young man who appeared to belong to my own rank—for she believed none of the absurd stories about his birth—to marry me: that young man was you, Master Denis. Are you ready?"

"Oh, she hates Denis worse than she does me," said Maurice, "for when she first came she wanted to flirt with him, when she could spare time from persecuting poor Car-

uthers, and the boy was so dull that he did not even perceive her drift."

"If a man may not marry his grandmother, it must be equally against the canon to flirt with her," said Denis.

"Not bad for the Irishman!" cried Phillis. "You are improving,—backwards. I never before heard you say a harsh word of any woman."

"I never met one so thoroughly antipathetic to me," he answered.

"But don't let me disturb transcendentalism!" cried Phillis. "Go back to your strife, good people. I am only sorry I can't stop to listen, but I must see what Ninny means to give us for supper."

"I've got a new pipe for the kitchen high-priestess, so I'll go with you," Maurice said, rising.

"I can take it, and save you the trouble."

"I cannot trust you: you would delude her into the belief that it was a tender attention on your own part," he answered.

So the pair went off, and left Georgia and Bourke to their own devices. Miss Grosvenor, anxious to keep the conversation on safe grounds, immediately began volubly upon their often-repeated arguments, and he bore his part. Still, these talks had changed in character; and Georgia had to feel, as she had several times done lately, that they were no longer general discussions upon his theories, but held particular significances which applied to their own case.

And the theories possessed, too, a constantly growing attraction for her: they were noble, they were vast, yet every detail, every minutia had its proper place, and gave them a practical look which staggered her, even while combating and refusing to admit their truth.

To-day she felt the spell more strongly than ever; common aims appeared so sordid and petty in comparison; her own cynically-expressed views sounded so hard and unwomanly; existence, as he painted it, appeared in a completeness such as it cannot attain under the pressure of ordinary ambitions, till at length she almost ceased to argue, and let him talk on. He watched her mobile face deepen in earnestness, her beautiful eyes glow, and suddenly cried out,—

"Ah, now you are your real self! Awhile ago, when you were trying to be cynical and unbelieving, it was not you; it

was just that Miss Grosvenor putting all sorts of worldly sophistries and false creeds which were worn threadbare long since, into your mouth."

"I am afraid it would be difficult to separate that unpleasant young person from me," she answered.

"Not a bit of it!" he exclaimed, confidently; "you are growing away from her every day! You don't like her; you don't believe in her; you have not for a good while, though you had been so carefully taught to consider her your real self that naturally it took time to discover the truth."

"I am obliged to confess that candor compels me to decline your compliment," she said.

"It was not a compliment; it is a simple statement of a fact which must be patent to anybody who knows you well."

"Then I fear that I cannot take rank among my own intimate acquaintances," returned she.

"Of course you cannot!" he said, in a tone which expressed surprise at her even having dreamed of so doing. "We agreed some time since that you did not in the least know yourself."

"As well as I recollect, that was only an assertion of yours. I don't think I claimed any share in it," she answered, unable to repress a smile, though she tried to look indifferent, and even a little scornful.

"But it is true, you know!"

"Really, Mr. Bourke, you are a singularly persistent person! Metaphorically, you thrust your opinions upon one at the point of the bayonet," cried she.

"Ah, well, you know it is only the use of the other kind of a bayonet that I object to," he said, laughingly.

"I am not sure that the moral or metaphysical one, or whatever the correct name would be, is not sometimes quite as unpleasant," she retorted. "You insist on my believing things that I don't believe, in the most extraordinary fashion."

"No, no: I only try to convince you that you make a mistake in supposing you do not believe them."

"It comes to pretty much the same thing, after all! But I assure you I am not to be convinced that my opinions are the exact opposite of what I consider them."

"You will gradually convince Miss Grosvenor, though," said he, with an exasperating smile.

"Suppose we stop splitting straws, and talk of something

else," returned she, with a shade of stateliness which he disregarded completely.

"So we will!" he cried. "Why, I have scarcely seen you since Mr. Caruthers and I got lost the other night."

"I am glad to find that no harm happened to such an interesting pair of babes in the wood," quoth she, sarcastically.

"Harm? A good deal of good, on the contrary."

"Oh, indeed!"

"We were very good friends before, but we got to know each other better than ever," cried Denis, in his eager headlong fashion.

"I trust the improved knowledge was satisfactory to both," she replied, in the same tone of cool raillery, though inwardly she felt far from cool, and was wondering what he meant.

"It certainly was to me," Denis said, "and he was good enough to admit the same on his part."

"Then, altogether, your getting lost proved fortunate. I should advise you to repeat the experiment."

"I don't know if Caruthers would agree to that," said Bourke, laughing. "Old Mrs. Mosely gave us a very decent supper, only, unfortunately, she had no bread in the house, and we had to take hot buckwheat-cakes in their place. However, Caruthers ate them, like a soldier, though he hates the abominations."

"You must go about provided with a loaf of bread for his benefit when you make expeditions," said Georgia.

"He's a capital fellow,—a splendid fellow!" cried Bourke.

"There I agree with you most decidedly."

"Of course you do! any rational creature must. Oh, and how right you were not to put off telling him! I knew you would do it, you are so good and frank. I—"

"Pray, how do you know that I did?" she interrupted, too much surprised by his knowledge even to pretend ignorance of his meaning.

"Why, he told me, of course."

"He told you!"

"Yes; and we both praised and admired you in a way that ought to have made your ears burn, if there were any truth in the old proverb."

"Certainly a most extraordinary confidence for one man to make *another*," she said, stiffly.

"Oh, we each made several," returned Bourke, quite at his ease. "I'll repeat you one of mine."

"Excuse me," said she; "I have no wish to intrude upon any matters that may be private between Mr. Caruthers and you."

"Not at all private,—at least where you are concerned. Indeed, you ought to be told," he answered, in the same cheerful way.

"I think I don't want to hear," she cried, hastily.

But he went on, unheeding, though now his face and voice grew more earnest:

"I told him I loved you, and that I hoped some day to persuade you to like me a little."

"I can imagine no confidence more superfluous, except the one he offered you," said Georgia.

"He had seen it for himself, so that, in fact, all I did was to admit he was right," said Bourke.

"Permit me to say," retorted Georgia, "that I think you both behaved in the most—the most—well, to use no stronger term—in a very remarkable fashion, and I shall tell Mr. Caruthers what I think, as plainly as I do you."

"No, you won't," said Bourke; "you'll be as gentle as possible with him, and spend your wrath on me; but I don't mind, because that only shows you like me best."

"I do not! Mr. Caruthers is the dearest friend I possess among your very troublesome sex."

"Friend,—yes! And he is worthy of being: but you can't put me off with a place among your friends."

"I think I will relegate you to the list of acquaintances."

"Too late—oh! Georgia, Georgia!"

"I wish you would drop that habit of calling me by my Christian name! You did it the other night before my aunt; luckily she did not happen to notice, else she would have overwhelmed me with her indignation,—very rightly, too, for that matter."

"But she must know, sooner or later; you might as well accustom her to it by degrees," said he.

"I think not, as I have just asked you to give up the habit," she replied, though her heightened color showed that she understood perfectly what he meant.

"Oh! the calling you by your name? Well, I'll be care-

ful only to do it when we are alone! But she must know sooner or later that I am trying to persuade you to take mine."

"I hope it will prove unnecessary, because I trust you mean to be sensible enough to relinquish all that folly."

"After you have admitted that you care for me!" cried he.

"What do you take me for? a stock—a stone? You care—you admitted it—you care!"

"It was just a midsummer madness—"

"Stop, stop! It is not right to jest; it is not fair either to yourself or me, Georgia."

"Then I will not," she answered. "Come, I am ready to speak as seriously as you could wish, and I want you to listen. We are in a false position for the time, Mr. Bourke,—more by my fault than yours, I own,—but it must end."

"It will when you listen to both our hearts and consent to marry me," he said, bending forward and looking full into her eyes with that glance at once tender, pleading, yet so strong and masterful, which affected her so deeply, in spite of every effort she could make to exert her will. "It can only end in that way, Georgia,—only that!"

"Denis Bourke, I do think you are mad!" she exclaimed. "Let us suppose—only it is difficult—that I were equally so! On what would we marry?"

But, carelessly as she tried to speak, as if regarding his words as only partly earnest, she could not help hesitating over the closing word of her sentence, and blushing as she did so.

"We should marry on what all people ought,—love!"

"I have not gone so far!"

"But when you do!" he cried.

"'Love in a hut, with water and a crust,
Is, Lord forgive us, cinders, ashes, and dust.'"

she quoted, with a sarcasm which hurt her, but seemed to produce no effect upon him, for he rejoined,—

"On that, and the very comfortable income we should have between us."

"Mine barely serves to pay my dressmaker."

"And mine will do the rest."

"Would or could, I suppose you mean."

He considered a moment, still studying her with that soft, masterful glance.

"No," he said, gently, yet in a voice which, low as it was, rang out firm as steel: "I meant will!"

She was afraid of herself and him; she could not sit there and prolong the conversation, which she knew would grow more and more earnest. She dreaded being urged to some admission which might give him a further advantage, and now every inch of ground was precious; she felt like a person on the sands, watching the tide rise higher and higher.

It was not dignified to take refuge in flight, though the only device she could hit upon, and of late she had too often shown herself incapable of maintaining the dignity and presence of mind which she used to think could never desert her under any circumstances, to stand upon ceremony with her own scruples.

She rose, and, murmuring some untelligible apology, walked into the house: he rose too, but neither called after her nor attempted to follow.

By the time she reached the foot of the stairs, she recollected that no move could have been more unwise; much better to have sat still, and, say what he would, intrench herself in the assertion that all such talk was folly. Running away became a tacit admission of fear; matters had gone too far between them for any hope that he might deem her offended. He would know she dared not listen to his pleadings, because there was a traitor in her own camp; know that her heart pleaded his cause with a mute eloquence stronger than any passionate words of his.

As she paused for an instant, she heard Phillis and Maurice come along the gravelled walk,—heard the former say,—

"Where is Georgia, Denis Bourke?"

"She has gone up-stairs," he answered, "but she will be back in a few moments."

She went softly on, and shut herself in her room, well aware she should not be allowed to remain, though she would have liked to punish the easy assurance of Bourke's information regarding her, by not appearing again. But this was impossible, for the others would think her ill, or that something unpleasant had occurred, and she should be troubled with questions too difficult to answer.

She kept to her solitude till she got her cheeks cool, and could behave as usual, then descended, and the evening passed quietly enough, varied by a visit from Aunt Conyngham, who had driven over with Mr. Caruthers for a little air and rest, after a day with her troublesome invalid. But they all knew that Aunt Conyngham rather enjoyed being a martyr to duty now and then, so no great amount of sympathy was required; words she must have; she wanted to know that her sacrifices were duly appreciated by everybody about.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE days slipped by, and now, with an inconsistency for which she bitterly reproached herself, Georgia began to regret their swift flight. She hated the thought of going back to her vapid life, with its round of monotonous pleasure: it was like changing the free air of heaven for an overheated room.

Denis Bourke was fighting his battle, and fighting it well, and Georgia's only aid against him and her heart lay in Mr. Caruthers's counsels, for her own reasonings had been gone over and over so frequently that she had ended as many people in this generation have done with their religious creeds,—studied them so carefully in order to display their chief points of strength that they discover the widest flaws and deepest lack just where they had expected the foundation to be most secure.

Fortunately for Mrs. Conyngham's peace of mind, she had no suspicion of what had taken place between her niece and Mr. Caruthers. The terms upon which they stood appeared to her to offer every assurance that all would end as it ought. They were together a good deal, almost daily; when Georgia came to pay her visit, she was able, when she went to sit with her patient, to leave them in her little salon, and she knew that had matters not been going well, Georgia would have avoided these *tête-à-têtes*. She only marvelled, as time passed, that Mr. Caruthers did not come to tell her that everything was definitely settled, and at length grew too impatient to bear suspense any longer. So now, as she did not deem it

exactly prudent to question Georgia, and Maurice declared his entire ignorance, she determined to speak to Mr. Caruthers: at least he ought to be frank with her, who had always stood his friend.

He afforded her the desired opportunity unintentionally one day, by entering her salon in the hope of finding Miss Grosvenor there.

"No Georgia this morning," Mrs. Conyngham said; "I got a little note from her. She will be over this afternoon, however."

"She is not indisposed, I trust?" he said, in a disappointed tone.

"Oh, no, no! Some accident has happened in one of the poor families she interests herself in, and she and Miss French have gone to see about the child. Georgia is always kindness itself: she can't bear to know that anybody suffers."

Mr. Caruthers was quite prepared to assent, as to any other virtue which might be ascribed to the young lady, though, had Georgia heard her aunt's speech, she would have frankly said that until the last few months it never would have occurred to her to take any personal trouble for the relieving of distress. She would have given as much money as she could, and tried to put the affliction out of her mind, because she hated to think of suffering; but voluntarily to witness it, be of personal assistance,—that would have seemed to her impossible, until this season in which she had learned so many lessons from Phillis and Denis Bourke.

Mr. Caruthers began to ask after the invalid, to converse upon indifferent subjects, instead of eagerly fastening upon the opportunity of talking about Miss Grosvenor, as he would have done a few months before. Mrs. Conyngham noticed this change in him, as she had frequently of late, and it nettled her. She tried to get back to a discussion of that young lady, but twice he circumvented her, thereby rousing her spirit; not that she put it so in her mind; she told herself it was her duty to know just how matters were going, and his duty to tell her, and duty must be fulfilled!

Nothing she detested so much as abruptness: she always liked to lead airily up to a topic,—have its appearance seem the natural result of conversation. As a rule, she would as soon have thought of pulling a friend out of bed as brusquely

to seize hold of a theme and drag it forcibly forward. But she was obliged to do so now: speak he must and should, and her irritation at having to violate one of her rules for the guidance of polite morals rendered her playful tone an effort, not sharp, but somewhat less mellifluous than usual, as she said,—

“Forgive me, but have not you and Georgia grown a little mysterious lately?”

“Mysterious?” he repeated, with a certain guilty sensation which he feared must hinder his interrogation appearing one of simple surprise.

“You certainly have,—since you oblige me to answer my own question,” she said, with a forced smile. “Now, Georgia has always been somewhat inclined that way; but it is a new phase on your part.”

“I assure you I have no mysteries,” returned he, wishing helplessly that he could find some excuse and escape. She meant, he saw, to commence troublesome inquiries, and he was mortally afraid that she might draw from him some admission which would bring annoyance on Georgia. Yet if he avoided the matter, or gave unsatisfactory answers, he would rouse suspicion in her mind, and that would be worse than anything else.

“I am very glad to hear it,” she said; “certainly it would not be like you.”

He bowed his thanks for the compliment, but Aunt Conyng-ham did not propose to rest content with mere signs of polite gratitude. He remained silent too, instead of saying something which might still allow her to usher in her subject with due ceremony, and, much as this reticence vexed her, vexation was not so strong as distaste at the necessity for abruptness. But, since he refused to aid, the pulling-out-of-bed process must take place, and it had better be accomplished without further delay.

“Then, if you have no mysteries, tell me exactly how you and Georgia stand,” said she, shivering to hear that excitement had sent her voice up at least half a tone higher than she could wish.

“How we stand?” he echoed, before he knew what he was saying.

“Precisely! Are matters settled yet? Do you go to Eu-

rope?" she demanded, and now her voice went a little too low, and sounded fairly stern and inquisitorial: should she never hit the just medium!

Her last question was, luckily, one he could easily answer; he could frame it, too, in a somewhat Jesuitical fashion.

"All thought of that will have to be put off for the time," he said. "We have talked—Miss Grosvenor and I—of the appointment,—the offer, I mean; but I shall decline it."

"So Georgia has changed her mind about wanting to spend a few years abroad?" said Aunt Conyngham. "Personally, of course I am very glad! No place suits me nowadays like New York or Newport, but I dread losing her society too much to have stayed behind. Yes, indeed, I am greatly pleased."

Her satisfaction was increased by the consciousness that at length she had got her voice back to the soft, monotonous tone which her goddess etiquette required.

"Oh, the air of Newport suits you admirably," said Mr. Caruthers, with quite an eager appearance of interest in what concerned her health. "And when you have made those alterations in your cottage that you propose, the house will be delightful."

"A very comfortable little nest," she replied, bound by the laws of her inexorable duty to pause long enough to notice his remark, though she hated to lose time now that she had got her subject out of bed and even been able to throw a little drapery of smiles over it. Sibyl Mayford might summon her, or Maurice might come in, and have her old claims to Mr. Caruthers's entire confidence re-established she must and would. "I want to consult you about the plans for the house; that can be done another time. Let us speak a little of Georgia and you, now that we have a quiet moment."

"Yes," said Mr. Caruthers; and never did assent sound more like a negative; but Aunt Conyngham had grown too eager to heed.

"I suppose she has not positively consented, else you would have told me; but you are quite certain?—you feel satisfied?"

"I am very glad that I came here," he answered. "Miss Grosvenor and I understand each other better than we ever did: I think she likes me better, too."

"I am sure of it!" cried Aunt Conyngham, with her brightest smile.

"As for my interest, my devotion, my desire for her happiness, you know what that is," he continued, regaining hope that he might still avoid absolutely dangerous questions.

"Of course I do, my dear friend. And she—well, it is not an admission I would make to any other man in the world in regard to a young lady,—but she is a good deal changed of late,—softer, gentler. Ah, I foresaw that your patience and your devotion would produce its due effect at length."

Her words stabbed sharply; for Mr. Caruthers knew to what that change in Georgia was attributable. To hear it mentioned by another caused him a pang of despondency,—a quick dread that the sentiment in the girl's mind was something deeper than the mere dream he and she had agreed to consider it.

"She is very nervous still,—has not got her strength back as could be wished; we must all be careful not to excite or trouble her," he said, partly to give himself a reason for the alteration in Georgia, partly as a warning to Aunt Conyngham.

"And that has made me refrain from saying a word to her; but you and I need not be so reticent. There has never been any hesitation between us about speaking freely."

"None," he answered, with a sudden deep regret.

But he did not add another word; and his listener's satisfaction began to fade somewhat,—not so much from a fear that matters were in a less advanced state than she had hoped, as from irritation because he would force her to ask point-blank for information.

"Then, I suppose, when we return to town her decision will be announced, and prove what we wish?"

"Eventually, I trust," he replied, with a doleful sinking at his heart, caused in a measure by a dread that his evasive reply might rouse Mrs. Conyngham's suspicions, but still more by the pang her reference to the alteration in her niece had occasioned him.

"Eventually!" murmured Aunt Conyngham, in a tone of dismay, flung rudely down from the realms of hope in which she had been basking. "Why, the six months are up!"

"My dear friend, I must have patience, even if another six months are requisite," he rejoined as she paused, trying to console himself by the recollection of what he trusted that period would do towards dispelling Georgia's dream and re-

storing her to the calm state of mind and judgment so desirable.

"Actually asks for six months more!" Aunt Conyngham fairly groaned. "But you must be firm! you must insist!"

"Forgive me, my dear lady, I can insist upon nothing."

Aunt Conyngham drew herself up; she looked portentously dignified and majestic.

"Then I must speak seriously to my niece," she said. "I cannot permit her to risk comment by such indecision; it is a wrong to herself and you, which must not be tolerated."

"I assure you, Mrs. Conyngham, that you will only do harm."

"You must permit me to judge."

"I cannot, since my interests are vitally involved," he said. "One thing is certain: any interference at this juncture will only endanger still further—I mean, will be prejudicial to my cause,—fatally so, perhaps."

She quickly let him perceive how unfortunate he had been in his choice of expression.

"What juncture?—what do you mean? What has happened, that you should use that word?" she asked.

"At this time, I should have said."

"But why? What has occurred?"

"As we were just saying, she is not strong; she—"

"Mr. Caruthers, you are keeping something back from me!" cried Aunt Conyngham, so far forgetting herself as positively to interrupt him,—a lapse which almost constituted a crime in her eyes. She recalled certain ill-natured speeches of Sibyl Mayford's,—sneering innuendoes, which implied a belief that Georgia had indulged in a flirtation with Denis Bourke. The wicked creature had repeated these to Mr. Caruthers; they had troubled him, and this was at the bottom of his reticence, his ambiguous form of speech! She must learn if her suspicion were correct, and set him at his ease. She hurried on before he could manage a response: "In town, in society, where she met people, you might have some cause to be disturbed occasionally; but here, of course, no complication could arise. For that matter, Georgia is no flirt. I am sure you would never for an instant listen to that absurd, heartless Sibyl. After all my sacrifices for her, she actually attempted to say that Georgia was flirting with Denis Bourke!"

In spite of his self-control, a wave of vivid color rushed up to Mr. Caruthers's forehead, faded, and left him pale from the contrast.

"Miss Grosvenor would never condescend to flirt with any man," he said. "Let me entreat you not to mention Mrs. Mayford's coarse calumny to her."

Before Aunt Conyngham could recover herself sufficiently to attempt any effort to discover the meaning of his agitation, there came a knock at the door.

"Only Rosalie," said she. "Come in, do."

Phillis and Maurice appeared on the threshold.

"The invitation sounded mightily like stay out!" cried Maurice, gayly. "Good-morning, most delightful of aunties: Miss French and I have come to make you a visit."

Mrs. Conyngham had to compose herself and greet Phillis with cordiality, but the pair could not have arrived more inopportunely. Phillis looked distractingly pretty in her fresh blue-and-gray costume, and Maurice's admiring eyes dwelt too frankly upon her not to increase the difficulty the aunt found in preserving the complete suavity of her manners.

"Where is Georgia?" she asked, as soon as the greetings had been exchanged, and Phillis had annoyed her and Mr. Caruthers also by giving him a flower out of the bouquet she had brought, and insisting on his putting it in his button-hole. "I thought, Miss French, that you and she were occupied."

"We were," said Phillis, calm as a May morning, "but this graceless nephew of yours and Denis Bourke invaded us, and insisted on our taking a drive."

"Oh, my niece is with you, then? Did she go to Mrs. Mayford's room?"

"No, no; she did not come, after all."

"I think I don't quite understand your explanation," said Aunt Conyngham, with a frigid smile.

"We don't understand, either," said Phillis, with malicious glee. "However, she has grandma and Mr. Bourke to entertain her. I came because I had promised to bring your friend some fresh cream and eggs."

"So kind of you," said Aunt Conyngham.

"You see," said Phillis, "there is a convenience in being acquainted with a dairy-maid."

Both Mrs. Conyngham and Caruthers knew that Sibyl May-

ford had called her so, but they had not supposed Phillis knew it, and it was difficult to echo her merry laugh.

"Of the sort they had in Arcadia, when kings' daughters exercised the profession," said Aunt Conyngham, with praiseworthy quickness.

"You shall have the biggest bunch of dahlias for that pretty speech," returned Phillis, "and we will cheat the invalid out of two eggs! Lady Jane Grey and Cleopatra laid these,—got up unusually early this morning in order to do it. Marie Antoinette and Lady Macbeth produced the others, and theirs are never so good."

Even Mr. Caruthers could not resist the absurd speech: he laughed more heartily than was customary with him.

"Shall we go and see Mrs. Mayford, Miss French?" asked Aunt Conyngham, presently. "She will want to thank you for your lovely flowers, and all the nice things you have brought her."

"Now, aunt, you know she never wanted to thank anybody for anything in the whole course of her life!" cried Maurice, still too vexed with the invalid's former impertinence to Phillis to care what he said, provided he could spare her the possibility of a fresh repetition of such rude folly.

"My dear Maurice, you forget that you are speaking of my friend,—an old and valued one," returned Mrs. Conyngham, reproachfully.

"I don't dispute the fact of her being old, but I fancy she would not be grateful to you for mentioning it," said Maurice.

Mr. Caruthers had suffered too much lately at the widow's hands not to betray a certain enjoyment in a jest at her expense. Phillis wisely refrained even from a smile, and, somewhat appeased by noticing that, Aunt Conyngham relaxed a little from her injured dignity, and said,—

"I was not alluding to her age—"

"Popularly supposed to be coeval with that of the Sphinx," cut in Maurice, "though there is nothing else in common between them, except the eternal smile: the widow's, however, is usually ill-natured instead of calm."

"Now, Maurice, you are really too bad. You know there is nothing I dislike so much as sneers at my friends," said Mrs. Conyngham, the more annoyed because she could not help *laughing*.

"Then I wonder you can endure Mrs. Mayford's society," replied Peyton; "for she spares nobody, and her favorite subjects for animadversion are your niece and nephew."

"Oh, Maurice! you must recollect that she has been suffering great pain: we oughtn't to mind if she is a little peevish and cross," urged Mrs. Conyngham.

"Illness was not needed to heighten the bitterness of her tongue," persisted Maurice.

"Nor can it be regarded as an excuse for bad temper and evil speaking," rejoined Mr. Caruthers, with a severity he seldom displayed in regard to a woman.

Mrs. Conyngham was astounded at this outburst from that source, though in her heart she could not blame either of the speakers: but she especially disliked to have such things said before Phillis, so she turned towards her, saying,—

"After this, Miss French, we shall have our own opinions when men declare that they are never scandalous. Now, shall we punish them by running away to visit their victim?"

"I wouldn't punish myself by doing it!" cried Maurice. "Eh, Caruthers?"

"It seems useless voluntarily to suffer martyrdom," that gentleman replied, for, in spite of his disapproval of Phillis, he had been indignant with the innuendoes against her which Mrs. Mayford had several times uttered in his hearing.

"I will go with pleasure, Mrs. Conyngham, if you think she would care to have me," said Phillis, out of deference to her hostess's feelings, refraining even from a reply to the remarks of the two men.

"Indeed, she will reproach me half the day if you don't," cried Aunt Conyngham, in a voice of real distress.

"Poor aunt! you must feel in these days as if you were the keeper of a menagerie of one!" laughed Maurice.

"She would hardly forgive me the last time you were here, because I did not let her know," pursued Mrs. Conyngham. "May I at least ask if she would like to see you?"

"Oh, certainly," Phillis answered.

"Miss French believes that bitterness is a tonic," said Maurice.

"When it is not, it is usually poison," added Mr. Caruthers.

"Please ring the bell, one of you," cried Mrs. Conyngham; "I am ashamed of both!"

Rosalie was summoned and bidden to carry the basket to Mrs. Mayford and inform that lady of Miss French's presence in Mrs. Conyngham's room. The Abigail returned with an invitation for the whole party to visit the invalid, and, though the gentlemen rebelled, Phillis insisted upon their going, as a punishment for their recent sins of speech. She took Mr. Caruthers's arm, and Mrs. Conyngham her nephew's, and the pair were obliged to submit.

They found Mrs. Mayford sitting up among her cushions, attired in an exceedingly tasteful but over-juvenile costume, and looking unusually young and well, a fact of which she was entirely conscious, and it rendered her good-natured.

She received Phillis rapturously, thanked Mrs. Conyngham for bringing her, and greeted the two gentlemen in her most amiable fashion.

"Though I owe them no thanks for coming," she added, gayly: "I am sure you were the attraction, Miss French! My cousin is a rare visitor, and Maurice never comes near me."

"I think I have not failed to call or inquire daily since you were able to receive me," Mr. Caruthers said.

"And if I keep away, it is only because I fear for my peace of mind," added Maurice.

Mrs. Mayford laughed, but gave him a quick glance of vexation: when he wanted to punish her he often indulged in these little thrusts which she understood as nobody else did.

"Now, if dear Georgia were only here, our party would be complete," she added, with elaborate playfulness,—“Georgia and that delightful creature, so brusque, so charmingly Irish,—that Mr. Bourke of yours—or Georgia's: which of you claims him, Miss French?”

"Oh, we share him between us," Phillis replied.

"Now, do you expect us to believe that, however generous you both are, two young ladies would consent to such a partnership?" cried the widow, with her most affected laugh. "That won't suffice: will it, cousin?"

"I am afraid I don't know enough about young ladies to judge," he answered, quietly.

"And where is Georgia?" continued Mrs. Mayford, addressing Phillis. "Off botanizing with your mutual property, I suppose."

"Reading to my grandmother, I fancy," Phillis replied. "We do our botanizing all together."

Mrs. Conyngham rewarded her with a cordial smile, feeling at the moment that she quite shared Georgia's enthusiasm for Miss French, and Mr. Caruthers's face for once showed a similar approval.

"And what does Maurice do in the mean while?" asked Mrs. Mayford, still with her affected laugh, which was inexpressibly irritating.

"I sit and compose sonnets. I am hoping each day to produce one perfect enough to offer at your shrine," said he.

"You have written so many to so many different women that I should think it would be difficult to invent anything new," said she.

"I shall surprise you sometime by a brilliant effort. You'll excuse its tardiness for the sake of its merit," returned he.

Mrs. Mayford knew of old that she was certain to be worsted if she began tilting at him, so she gave up the contest, allowed the conversation to become general for a few minutes, managing as her contribution divers compliments to Phillis, which she contrived, with a good deal of skill, to make at Miss Grosvenor's expense, because she knew she could annoy Mrs. Conyngham and Mr. Caruthers by that means. That gentleman felt his patience rapidly evaporating, and was meditating an exit, though aware that he should find it difficult to escape her clutches, when luckily a servant appeared at the door with the information that a couple of the coal directors wished to see him.

The others rose too, but Mrs. Mayford positively held fast to Phillis, and cried out against this cruelty in deserting her so soon.

"I hardly ever get a visit from you," she pleaded, "and this tiresome ankle won't let me go to you."

"I hope it will before long," Phillis said, civilly.

"The doctor has promised that I may drive to-morrow," said Mrs. Mayford; "but I don't know if my cousin will be able to spare time to take me."

"I shall be at your service," he answered.

"Oh, then, Miss French, I shall come to see you! I am dying for another peep at your picturesque house and that dear, delightful grandmamma of yours."

"We will make a high day and holiday of it, if Mrs. Conyngham and Mr. Caruthers will come too and have tea with us," said Phillis, who cared no more for Mrs. Mayford's petty spitefulness than she did for the buzzing of a fly, and enjoyed the opportunity of teasing Maurice by giving the invitation. Mr. Caruthers bowed his thanks, and the widow cried,—

"Oh, that will be heavenly! But I can't walk a step; I shall have to be carried down-stairs."

"The carriage can drive up to the porch; you shall be lifted out, and established on a lounge,—I can't say sofa, for I haven't got one," said Phillis.

"So good of you,—so kind!" exclaimed the widow. "Won't it be charming, Mrs. Conyngham?"

"I shall be most happy to go," that lady answered; "I only hope you won't find the exertion too much for your nerves."

Mrs. Mayford knew, and so did the others, that Mrs. Conyngham meant temper when she said nerves, and the invalid sighed.

"Ah! I have worn out everybody's patience!—no wonder!"

"I trust that illness would never wear out mine," Mrs. Conyngham replied, very significantly, for she had not recovered her equanimity since the attacks on Georgia.

Mr. Caruthers took his leave, and Maurice, finding that the widow was determined to detain Phillis, said,—

"I'll go with you, Caruthers: I want to hear what your men have decided. Miss French, I will come back for you in a few minutes."

"She has promised me half an hour!" cried the widow; "and I'll not be cheated out of a second."

When the gentlemen had departed, Mrs. Conyngham excused herself; she had a letter to write which must go by the noon post, and was glad to escape, for, between the dissatisfaction roused in her mind by her conversation with Mr. Caruthers, and the annoyance left from Mrs. Mayford's sneers, she could endure nothing more that morning.

Phillis did not in the least mind the interview; she declared to Georgia afterwards that she found it interesting,—like studying some new species of wasp in such an imperfect stage of

development that half the time when it tried to sting, it hurt itself instead of its intended victim.

But for a while the widow was sweetness personified; she petted and flattered Phillis, and tried her best to hide the fact that she considered herself condescending, and Phillis hugely enjoyed her unconsciously patronizing tone, and appeared innocent and rural and unsophisticated, longing to discover what motive really lay at the bottom of the shallow creature's desire for the *tête-à-tête*.

Mrs. Mayford played her part very well, but she stood about as much chance of duping Phillis French as an elderly, captious grimalkin would in deceiving an active young fox, and before many moments Phillis perceived her drift: she wanted to find out on what terms Georgia and Mr. Caruthers stood; whether he was often at the house, and if there were truth enough in her suspicions that Bourke liked Georgia, to give her a new means of worrying her cousin. And Phillis, far from sharing Hamlet's dislike to being played upon as a pipe, chatted softly what the widow thought a tune of her own selection, and managed to say a score of things which enraged her listener, without affording any information that could be in the least valuable for her purpose.

It would have required a much more astute person to penetrate Phillis's assumption of innocence, and Mrs. Mayford finally took refuge in ill temper at her lack of success in gaining a gleam of news, and mentally decided that the girl was a rustic idiot, and all the talk she had heard from the others about her witty speeches and *espèglerie* all nonsense. She waxed openly condescending and patronizing, and Phillis French received the patronage so meekly that she was induced to go still further lengths. She began to talk about Maurice Peyton,—to tell tales of his wildness, his profligacy, his heartlessness towards women, his desire to captivate and render wretched every girl he approached.

"I tried once before to make you understand, my dear," she said, "and now I feel it my duty to speak openly! I have taken such a fancy to you,—you are so sweet, so natural, so unspoiled! I should never forgive myself if I sat by and let you suffer from believing in Maurice Peyton's falsehoods."

—On this shivered Phillis, apparently quite aghast at this revelation of the young man's turpitude.

"I know him thoroughly!" she cried, lifting her voice in the excitement into which she had worked herself. "I warn you for your own peace be careful! Maurice Peyton will make love to you if he can—"

"Sibyl!" called a warning voice.

The widow and Phillis looked round. To the former's utter confusion, she saw Mrs. Conyngham and Peyton standing in the door-way. They had met in the hall and reached the threshold just in time to catch her closing words.

Mrs. Conyngham looked angry, Maurice white and determined; but Phillis French was utterly unmoved.

A quick thought darted through Peyton's mind: he would turn the woman's spitefulness to service to himself! If he spoke out before her and his aunt he should do more to convince Phillis of his sincerity than he could in weeks of ordinary intercourse. He came forward: his aunt followed.

"Thanks, dear Mrs. Mayford," he said, "for pleading my cause! I have already made love to Miss French! I have asked her to marry me, and, though she will give me no hope as yet, I trust some day she may."

Mrs. Conyngham sank into the first chair that offered: a picture of helpless misery!

For once in her life Phillis French was taken aback, and sat speechless, blushing hotly enough to justify Mrs. Mayford's term of "pretty rustic." As for the widow herself, she was frightened, and could only cower low among her cushions with a nervous titter, feeling that the best way out for her was to have hysterics, and thankful to find herself so near them.

At this instant, two ladies stopping in the hotel appeared at the door. Phillis took her leave of Sibyl Mayford, whispered something in Mrs. Conyngham's ear which caused her listener's face to brighten, and left the room, accompanied by Peyton.

They went down-stairs, got into the carriage, and drove away. Maurice did not speak till they had left the town behind them, and his silence afforded Phillis an opportunity to recover her wits and decide upon her wisest line of conduct at this crisis.

Suddenly he turned towards her, and said,—

"I have to thank Mrs. Mayford; you can never pretend not to think me in earnest again."

"It was very gallant of you," retorted she. "Don't be frightened: I sha'n't take a base advantage!"

"Now, in heaven's name, what do you mean?" he cried.

"Just what I said! It was very gallant of you! You were afraid I might be confused by the contretemps, and so flung yourself into the gap; but I told your aunt you only did it out of chivalry, and that I perfectly understood your motives."

She began to laugh. He bit his monstache quite savagely.

"I do think you are the most unfeeling girl that ever lived!" cried he.

"It was too funny!" she exclaimed. "How I wish Georgia had been there! Now, don't be cross: I tell you I admired your knight-errantry. Do let us laugh a little!"

"I will, when you admit that you believe me,—that you know I love you,—that—"

"Bless me, there is Ann Raines!" interrupted Phillis.

And, sure enough, at the turn of the road they had reached stood Miss Raines, upright and stiff, waiting for the wagon to pass.

"Land's sakes! I want to know—ef it ain't you!" she cried.

"In the flesh," said Phillis. "We will take you home; I was going to send for you this afternoon: we really must cut out those new curtains."

"Wall, I'm agreeable," replied Miss Raines. "Don't budge, Mr. Peeton: the wagon ain't high, and I can h'ist myself in as easy as winkin'! I hope you're pretty chirpy this mornin'?"

"As a wood-thrush," laughed Phillis.

Maurice privately anathematized the old maid, but he reflected that any show of crossness would only amuse Phillis French, so he answered merrily, and they drove home in perfect harmony.

But could he have known what a relief the spinster's appearance was to Phillis, he would have forgiven Miss Raines and gained fresh hope.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It would require the powers of an epic poet to chant the description of the battle royal which took place between Mrs. Conyngham and the widow, when the former had sufficiently recovered from her stupefaction to set about the punishment of her ungrateful friend.

Sibyl Mayford fought gallantly, but found herself no match for her antagonist, now that the latter was fully roused. Without meaning disrespect to either lady, I must confess that any looker-on would have been irresistibly reminded of a contest between a white owl and a hawk ; but, however comical the duel might have appeared to irreverent witnesses, it was downright tragic to the pair engaged.

When other resources failed, Mrs. Mayford took refuge in hysterics, but they proved as unavailing as her wordy weapons. She was mercilessly spattered with water, given to drink of something as bitter as hyssop, and all the while the voice of her ministering spirit heaped wrath and condemnation upon her, and wound up with a threat never to approach her again—never to speak to her while life should last—unless she apologized to Maurice.

The widow knew that Mrs. Conyngham could show herself as energetic in animosity as in friendship, so she agreed at length that a message expressive of regret should be given to Peyton. Then she fell back in renewed hysterics, sobbing,—

“ You might thank me, I should think, instead of upbraiding! Now you know just how crazy Maurice is, and can try to stop him! I don't suppose you are anxious to have that girl—nobody knows who—for a niece.”

Mrs. Conyngham deigned no reply, but the words went home. She retired to her room and indulged in reflections of a very melancholy nature, which were interrupted by the appearance of the brother and sister, looking as cheerful as if quite unconscious of the trouble they were causing her.

Aunt Conyngham received the pair with what she intended for an air of gentle melancholy, but which they interpreted to

mean crossness, and a glance exchanged between them said very plainly that they wished they had kept away.

"I have brought Georgia to make you a visit, you duck of an auntie," cried Maurice, gayly.

"I am very much obliged, I am sure," Mrs. Conyngham replied, plaintively: "it is getting quite an event for me to have a visit from either of you."

"It is at least twenty-four hours since I was here last," Georgia answered, laughing outright. Plaintiveness was not a style which suited the aunt, and she appeared ludicrous when she attempted it: Maurice always declared that it seemed as much out of keeping as it would be for a peacock to affect humility.

"And I dawned upon you this morning, along with the sunshine and other beautiful things," he added, as a sequence to Georgia's remark.

"Oh, if you call *that* coming to see *me*!" returned Aunt Conyngham, with an emphasis to which no italics could do justice.

"Well, what do you call it, auntie?" Maurice asked.

"When either of you come, it is to rush in and out like a whirlwind, and bring a crowd of people in your wake," cried Aunt Conyngham, with a magnificence of exaggeration which would have done credit to a poet. "You must excuse me if I say that I do not consider such proceedings visits! No doubt you will tell me I am unreasonable and *exigeante*—"

"I am afraid I shall have to," cut in Maurice.

"I expect to be misunderstood," sighed Aunt Conyngham: "it is the usual fate of the few people in this world who try to do their duty by their relatives and friends."

"You are tired, auntie," said Georgia. "I am sure you have had a good deal to bear to-day."

"Indeed I have," she replied, with a despairing accent which was lost on Georgia, as she knew nothing of what had taken place; but Maurice understood what it meant, and smiled blandly under the curves of his long blonde moustache.

"I suppose that wretched Mrs. Mayford has been more teasing than usual," continued Georgia, in all innocence; "but you must be a good auntie, and not visit her sins on our heads."

"Heaven forbid that I should add to the weight of your

own!" cried Aunt Conyngham, for an instant permitting her plaintiveness to degenerate into a tone of downright aggression.

"I am not conscious of having done so, either," said Georgia. "It must be Maurice. What new wickedness have you committed, my erring brother?"

"To err is human," began Maurice, pompously; "'to forgive—'"

"We know all about that!" interrupted Georgia. "But Aunt Conyngham doesn't look a bit as if she meant to be divine on this occasion."

"Oh, Georgia, you had better tell me at once that I am cross and detestable. It is your habit whenever I attempt to expostulate or offer you advice if I see you doing wrong," Mrs. Conyngham replied, with mingled severity and pathos.

"Mercy, dear! don't make me feel as if I was one of those misguided young orphans who need to be put into a reformatory asylum," Georgia exclaimed.

"Pardon me, Georgia," said her aunt, "but I do not think such allusions quite—quite delicate."

"Lord!" groaned Maurice. "Now, auntie, I really do not think I can stand much of this sort of thing! Tell Georgia what it is you are in a wax about,—if it is with her,—or me, if I am the one,—but don't make a sort of sentimental Lady Macbeth of yourself, for heaven's sake, and all our sakes, I beg and entreat."

"If that incomprehensible expression means that you think I am angry, you are mistaken. I am grieved,—grieved and hurt," she answered, putting her handkerchief to her eyes, not because there were any tears there, but it seemed a fitting finale to her pathetic assertion.

"What has Sibyl Mayford been saying?" asked Georgia. "How can you let her spiteful tongue set you worrying over us, auntie?"

"Do you suppose me capable of allowing any person to speak against my own flesh and blood?" demanded Aunt Conyngham, grandly.

"But I know she will do it, whether you permit or not," cried Georgia, laughing, and relieved to find an excuse for so doing.

"This time she was right enough in much that she said," retorted Aunt Conyngham, somewhat inconsistently.

"Oh, then she has been abusing us. I was sure of it!" cried Georgia.

"I shall not try to defend myself a second time. If you choose to accuse me of letting people speak ill of you, I shall submit," returned Aunt Conyngham, ignoring with delightful ease the admission which had just left her lips. "Maurice, Mrs. Mayford desired me to apologize to you for what we overheard her say this morning."

She gave Georgia a glance of reproachful triumph as she spoke, and seemed to expect her to be overwhelmed by this refutation of the charge that she, Aunt Conyngham, the model of all virtues, could be disloyal to her young relatives, whatever their sins; but Georgia only looked unbounded wonder as to what the words could possibly mean.

"I don't wish to be abusive," said Maurice, "but you must permit me to say, Hang Mrs. Mayford and her apologies."

"But what were they for?" asked Georgia. "What had she said?"

"Only the old story: I was a villain, a libertine,—assassin, I presume, and all the rest of it," Maurice explained. "She was saying it to Miss French, and we overheard! I was very much obliged to the old cat: it gave me an opportunity to—"

Mrs. Conyngham interrupted him by sinking back in her chair with a long, low groan.

"An opportunity to—well?" demanded Georgia, cruelly oblivious of her aunt's ostentatious signs of anguish.

"To say that I was in love with Phillis, and had asked her to marry me," Maurice replied, composedly.

Mrs. Conyngham was preparing to groan a second time, but Georgia's manner of receiving her brother's disclosure kept her silent with stony wrath. The young lady first clapped her hands; then she flew at Maurice and hugged him, exclaiming,—

"I am so glad!—so glad! And will she—will she?"

"Well, that's a subject for future consideration," said he, with a quizzical smile. "At all events, I could give her no better proof that I was in dead earnest, than by speaking out there and then: so I did it."

"I had so hoped you would! I am so glad!" ejaculated Georgia, clapping her hands anew.

Mrs. Conyngham regarded her with a mixture of pity and disgust.

"As you are not five years old, and I trust not a maniac, Georgia, perhaps you will sit down and let me finish what I wished to say to Maurice, instead of prolonging this display, which looks as if you were the one or the other."

"Such delightful news does not come every day!" cried Georgia. "You really must let me be a little crazy, aunt."

Maurice gave her an affectionate smile; but, after one final glare of scorn, Mrs. Conyngham fairly turned her back on the absurd young woman, and addressed her nephew with appalling stateliness:

"I understood perfectly what your motive was in speaking as you did."

"I should say it was plain enough," he broke in.

Georgia laughed from sheer happiness; Mrs. Conyngham lifted both hands in protest.

"Miss French understood also: she whispered to me that she fully comprehended," pursued the stately lady.

"I hope so, I am sure," rejoined Maurice.

"I knew that you wished to relieve Miss French from an embarrassing situation," his aunt continued, ignoring his rapid sentence; "I knew that you had no idea she would take your gallant speech seriously."

"You had better tell him he is a coward and be done!" cried Georgia, with flashing eyes.

Again Mrs. Conyngham elevated her hands, then continued, addressing Maurice, who regarded her with an amused smile, which so discomfited her that, instead of the words of wisdom she meant to utter, she only produced a weak repetition of a former remark:

"Miss French knew it too: she told me so as she went out."

"Did she?" asked Maurice. "That shows how mistaken both you and Miss French can be, my dear aunt! I love her, and, if I ever can, I mean to win her for my wife."

Georgia's face grew so radiant and beautiful that it was a pity none of her admirers were present to have the pleasure of looking at her.

Mrs. Conyngham indulged in an instant's stony stupefaction, then exclaimed,—

"You, Maurice,—you, of all men,—the proudest man I know?"

"And to gain that honor will be the pride of my life," said he.

"You,—that have always believed in birth and blood, have been so severe on any approach to a *mésalliance*,—you, marry a girl of whom one knows nothing!"

"The prettiest, cleverest, most bewitching creature that ever lived," interrupted Georgia. "As good and true as she is pretty."

Again Maurice thanked her with a smile, but sat waiting for his aunt to finish.

"In regard to whose antecedents we are completely ignorant, —whom you have only known a very short time. It can't be, Maurice! You, who might marry any woman you chose!"

"But, you see, I have chosen her," he replied. "You are quite right. I used to have all sorts of nonsensical ideas about birth and station. They appear empty enough now. I suppose that is because I am really in love at last."

"It is one of your whims,—your fancies," cried his aunt. "Maurice, if you persevere, you will be the most wretched man alive. Who is she?—who was she? Just having to answer that question alone will fret you like a goad."

"She is my wife, will be sufficient answer," returned he, proudly.

"Oh, you are mad!" exclaimed Mrs. Conyngham. "Why, you might marry Lady Dacre's cousin—"

"Oh, no, I mightn't!" he replied, decidedly.

"This is too much! I never dreamed such a blow could reach me from you!" moaned his aunt. "Fancy Sibyl Mayford telling that your wife was a dairy-maid!"

"The young lady is the owner of a very fair country estate," observed Maurice, quietly.

"That she sold butter and eggs!" gasped his aunt.

"So do plenty of your friends in Europe, who boast pedigrees and titles that date back to goodness knows where," said Georgia.

Mrs. Conyngham turned upon her with withering acrimony.

"No absurd speeches from you, Georgia, can surprise me. I begin to understand where you have acquired your new and astounding ideas. You must excuse me for saying that I think your summer here has been far from improving either to your mind or your manners. But Maurice,—to hear

Maurice talk in that insane fashion,—it is enough to break one's heart!"

"You will think better of it," said her nephew, coolly. "At all events the matter is settled,—I mean, so far as I am concerned! I shall have a hard struggle to win my prize, for she doesn't think me half good enough for her, and God knows I'm not!"

"With your fortune, your station, your talents!"

"The first two Miss French doesn't value the worth of a straw; the latter she has no great faith in, because, as she justly says, I have done nothing to prove that I possess any."

"A very remarkable young person!" sneered Aunt Conyngham.

"A very remarkable young lady indeed," said Maurice, with elaborate composure, while his eyes began to blaze, and the muscles of his mouth to work. Mrs. Conyngham knew the signs, and perceived she must be careful.

"I think her charming, too," she said, "in a certain way. Well educated, witty,—but not like a person who has lived in society; not what your wife ought to be, Maurice."

"And I think her everything that my wife ought to be. Naturally, I am the best judge," he answered, flinging back his head with a haughty movement his relatives knew so well. "I had no idea, aunt, of asking advice. I simply make the announcement of my intentions to you and my sister, because you belong to my family; I am the head of it, and, though I expect to leave you and Georgia free, I am and I must be my own master."

A silence fell upon them for a little: poor Aunt Conyngham looked so wretched that her companions grew rather sorry for her.

"I think we must go now, Georgia," Maurice said, presently.

"I have a great deal to say to Georgia," cried Aunt Conyngham, rousing herself. She had said all she dared to Maurice, but she did not propose to be awed by his sister.

"You are coming over to the Nest to-morrow," pleaded Georgia.

"Oh, you must make my excuses to—to Miss French," replied Aunt Conyngham, her voice growing suddenly quite weak, as if she were on the verge of exhaustion. "I fear I shall not be equal to the exertion."

"The drive will do you good," said Maurice. "I shall expect you, aunt. Since what happened to-day, your refusing to go, after having accepted the invitation, would be a slight to Miss French which I cannot permit."

"Oh, very well; I will try," sighed she. "But how are you and Sibyl Mayford to meet?"

"As usual, if she is polite; but you know she must not try to annoy Miss French."

"Phil doesn't mind her in the least," said Georgia.

"Really, I don't know how she can make up her mind to show her face," cried Mrs. Conyngham. "I assure you she has heard a good many plain truths from me this morning."

It was a sort of comfort to recollect that she had not been worsted in all quarters. Georgia and Maurice could not help feeling that, richly as she deserved rebuke, poor Mrs. Mayford was to be pitied on this special day.

When her relatives had gone, Mrs. Conyngham sat thinking very dolefully. She could only hope that Maurice's fancy would change before it led him to irremediable lengths. If there was any way of influencing the girl herself,—but she was too much afraid of her nephew to venture upon open effort in that direction.

And she had had no opportunity to speak to Georgia about her conduct towards Mr. Caruthers. After her hoping that all was settled, to find that the perverse creature demanded fresh delays, to have Maurice's insanity added to these troubles seemed more than she could bear.

She told Mr. Caruthers, and had the consolation of perceiving that he shared her views and was personally predisposed against Phillis; but, as his opinion was not likely to have any weight with Maurice, Mrs. Conyngham could only value its expression because it gratified her to obtain sympathy.

Peyton and Bourke spent the evening at the Nest, but Phillis was as anxious as Georgia that their *partie carrée* should not divide into two *tête-à-têtes*, and naturally the pair were able easily to circumvent all the plans the young men could devise to bring about this consummation.

When the visitors were gone, and the girls up-stairs in Phillis's room, Georgia said,—

"I know all about it!—oh, you darling! You will be my sister; promise!"

"Be your great-grandmother!" cried Phillis. "What nonsense have you got in your head now?"

"I feel quite thankful to that horrid Sibyl Mayford," continued Georgia: "it gave Maurice a lovely opportunity! As he says, you can never again pretend to believe he is not in earnest."

"I told him it was very polite, so now we are quits," returned Phillis. "Oh, dear! it was the funniest scene! If you could only have seen us! I was actually breathless. And your aunt's face of despair, and the Mayford preparing for hysterics, and Maurice strutting up like a huge turkey-cock,—it was too delicious!"

They both laughed; but Georgia soon said,—

"Now, don't be a tease; leave all that for Maurice. We can talk seriously: you know he will never hear a word from me."

"But we've nothing to talk seriously about."

"Oh, Phil! Don't you like him?"

"Have you forgotten what I once said to you?" Phillis asked, with sudden austerity. "I must like no man in that way,—least of all your brother!"

"Phil, Phil!"

"Don't worry me, Georgia; be good!"

"But you do like him! you do!"

"Good-night," said Phillis, and went away, leaving Georgia completely deprived of her high spirits, though she tried to comfort herself with the thought that Phillis's odd remark only referred to differences in worldly station, not that there was any actual mystery in her life.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE girls had given strict orders to their two visitors that they were not to be intruded upon the next morning, as they proposed to devote themselves to certain culinary mysteries, which were to result in marvellous cakes and creams, for the delectation of such well-behaved people as stayed away till tea-time.

Denis was busy, so Maurice went out shooting, but towards

noon Phillis, looking forth from the sacred precincts of her spring-house, saw him approaching the door by the path which led down from the hill.

"You have missed your way," she said, as he came within speaking-distance: "there are no partridges here."

"Oh, yes, there are," he answered, opening his game-bag and displaying a brace of birds. "These are for grandma."

"There she is in the arbor with Georgia: go and show them to her," said Phillis.

"But do allow a fellow to rest a minute, please. Denis dragged me out of bed at daylight, and I've been on my feet ever since," he pleaded.

As he spoke, he seated himself on one end of the table at which she stood rolling a sheet of dough into wafer-like thinness, to be cut into fanciful shapes by certain sharp little tin instruments, and which when baked formed a most appetizing sweet, exulting in the name of "vanilla cookies." Cinders was busy skimming cream at the other end of the table, and Maurice's second glance was to see if she had not nearly completed her task. Phillis saw the glance, and said at once,—

"Cinders, when you have finished, you must pound some sugar. She'll make an awful noise about it, Mr. Peyton: if you don't want to be deafened you had better depart."

"And a nice housekeeper you are, to waste time in that way, when plenty of pulverized sugar can be bought," he answered.

"One-half plaster!" cried she. "Thanks: I don't poison people who come to eat my cake with any such dreadful stuff."

All the while she talked she was working in her brisk, deft fashion, and had covered two large plates with her paste cut into varied patterns of rings and leaves.

"What is to be done with those, now?" he asked.

"You are to carry them to the kitchen, for Ninny to put into the oven," she answered.

"There is no hurry, I suppose."

"There is! If they wait they will be spoiled: so go at once and mind you don't drop them!" she ordered.

He obeyed immediately, and grandma and Georgia laughed aloud as they saw him pass the arbor with his load. He was back in two minutes, and found Phillis drying her hands on a towel.

"Now you have done everything," he said, "so we can sit down in the garden."

"Do you see those?" she asked, pointing to several tempting-looking loaves of cake. "Those are to be iced: that is why Cinders is pounding sugar. How do you like the noise?"

"It sounds like Liliputian thunder," he said.

"Harder and faster, Cinders," commanded Phillis, in a cheerful voice.

"Come into the garden till she has done making that abominable row," urged Maurice.

"And cull a carrot, Ward!" she quoted from the writings of the immortal Artemus. "Thanks; my name is neither Maud nor Ward, and I don't like carrots, and I've no time to waste on idle young men, and I wish you would go away."

"Then I won't," he answered, "and that's all there is about it."

"Where are the eggs, Cinders?" she asked. "Oh! on the table. Now give me the whisk and two dishes. We're going to have a little more row, as you elegantly term it, Sir Maurice. I hope you'll enjoy the music. If you stop here you must pay for your seat on my table by helping to beat the eggs. Which will you choose?—the white or the yolks?"

"What do you want of the yolks? Icing isn't yellow."

"But custard is, Mr. Wisdom."

She handed him the dish in which she had put the little golden balls, and gave him the whisk.

"You are to beat and beat, and never leave off," she said. "Take care; mind what you're about, else you'll spill them."

He began his operations, while she took up the dish which contained the whites of the eggs.

"Now at least we can talk a little," he said.

"Oh, with perfect ease," she replied, making a tremendous clatter with the fork wherewith she was beating the snowy liquid. "Faster! you don't stir them half fast enough! Cinders, pound harder: that sugar will never be a powder! The custard is for Mr. Caruthers's special benefit; he doesn't like me, but he does like my custard,—when it's flavored with chocolate."

"Who said he didn't like you?" asked Maurice, suspending his toil to ask the question.

"As if one needed to be told! Don't stop; if you can't

do two things at once, you must let your inquisitiveness wait till you have beaten the eggs."

"Inquisitive!—I?" he cried, in scorn.

"Terribly so! I should think you had asked me at least thirty questions since you came in! Ah! now you've got a spot of egg on your coat-sleeve: I knew you would be clumsy. Cinders, bring a towel and rub this little boy clean! I think, on the whole, I had better pin it round your shoulders."

He submitted with a good grace, for the pleasure of feeling her pretty fingers touch his neck.

"They are to be my property, you know," he whispered, and then gave a start which nearly upset the pan he held.

"Did I prick you?" Phillis asked, sympathizingly.

"Slightly. I should say that pin must be about a foot long, and as big round as a crow-bar."

"If you had kept still you'd not have been hurt. Now, beat, beat, Cinders!—pound, pound!" and she set an example of industry for them to follow, clattering her fork louder and more rapidly than ever.

"Oh, I say, haven't we done it enough?" he asked.

"Not half! not a quarter!"

"But you needn't make so much noise! See here: I want to tell you—"

"You needn't stop; beat, beat! There! that's better! Well, you want to tell me? Cinders, Cinders, there comes the Maltese kitten! Drive her out, else she'll have her nose in the milk-pans before you know it."

To attempt pretty speeches under the circumstances was beyond even Maurice. Just then he heard Georgia and grand-ma laugh.

"They've caught sight of you," Phillis explained. "Oh, if you could only see how deliciously absurd you look!"

"You've done nothing but force me to look absurd in one way or another ever since I knew you," retorted he.

"You must have a fatal facility for appearing so, since it is so easy to bring the consummation about," she declared.

"Do you ever mean to be serious?" he asked.

"I am serious. See how beautifully these eggs froth! Do you know, I think I shall make a floating island."

"For us to go and live on?"

"Always for Mr. Caruthers's benefit. I suppose it is

the natural contradiction of human nature, but I adore that stately gentleman, just because he never will even look at me."

"Good gracious! how sick I am of hearing about him. Do leave Georgia's prey alone."

"I won't leave him alone. If he'll not fall in love with me, at least I'll force him to eat himself into an indigestion."

"I don't think your way of treating a man who does fall in love with you is likely to tempt him into the same experiment."

"I couldn't hear," she said, fiercely clattering her spoon; "but it is no matter. I shall place you by Mrs. Mayford at the tea-table: mind you keep her good-natured."

"Oh, I'm quite ready to try, since yesterday! Have you been thinking a little, Phillis?"

"Oh, yes: I think they are beaten enough," she said. "You may leave off now."

He put the pan on the table with an air of satisfaction, and unpinned his bib. Cinders had ceased pounding sugar, and was taking her departure.

"Now be good-natured to me," he pleaded. "Just say—"

"Drive the kitten out, please: she's got in again."

He expelled the troublesome grimalkin, and then returned to the charge.

"I sha'n't have another moment alone with you all day."

"Good-by, if you're going. Just bring the pounded sugar within my reach first, like an amiable creature."

"You needn't try to put me off. I—"

"Georgia," called Phillis, "come here, please, and tell me if I shall color part of the icing. Bring grandma, too; for, after all, your opinion isn't worth anything."

"Then I shall stop where I am," Georgia called back.

"No, you won't. You must come and drop the sugar in the dish while I beat. Now, hurry: you promised to be useful to-day. Not a crumb of cake shall you have if you don't help me."

So grandma and Georgia entered the spring-house, and Maurice knew that he might as well resign himself to leave the wilful girl in peace for the present. She did not mean him to talk seriously, and the task of subduing Proteus could not have been more difficult than an effort to force Phillis French to the end of her devices.

He went grumbling back to the Den ; but as early in the afternoon as they dared, he and Bourke presented themselves at the Nest. They gained little by this manœuvre, however ; for the girls did not descend until nearly time for the arrival of the visitors, and, when they did, began arranging flowers on the tea-table, and finding so many other duties to perform that conversation was impossible.

" You two idle young men may roll the green lounge into the porch," Phillis said, with the air of a person conferring a favor. " We do not blame either of you for not being ornamental,—that is your misfortune,—but we will make you useful, so that you won't have to feel the fact of your existing an entire mistake on the part of nature."

Presently the carriage appeared round a turn in the road, with Mrs. Mayford comfortably extended on the back seat.

" Well, they have come early enough," grumbled Maurice.

" Yes ; but not too early, as you did," replied Phillis. " Go down and open the gate, Denis Bourke ; and you other little boy, wheel the lounge farther forward. Now, be well behaved, both of you, and you shall have the pleasure of rolling the fair Dido's couch into the dining-room when we are ready for tea."

The carriage drove up to the porch, somewhat to the detriment of the turf, as Phillis noticed with secret regret. Mr. Caruthers helped Mrs. Conyngham out, then he and Bourke lifted the widow and placed her on the lounge. For a few moments everybody was occupied with her, and this disposed her to amiability ; but indeed she fully intended to restrain her tongue during the whole visit, for she knew that Mrs. Conyngham would make her suffer afterwards if she did not.

That lady was in anything but a sunny mood, though very cordial to grandma and gracious to Phillis, while her greeting to Bourke left nothing to be desired. Nobody could have imagined from her manner that towards the two young people at least she was in far from a Christian state of mind.

Phillis petted the invalid, as much at ease as if no recollection of yesterday's scene remained in her thoughts ; and Mrs. Mayford, anxious to appease her friend, flattered their young hostess till Mrs. Conyngham considered that she overdid the matter, and was almost as much offended as she would have been if the widow had given way to her little infirmity of uttering sharp speeches.

Mr. Caruthers talked with grandma, and was rewarded for his respect to age by Georgia's joining them and giving them the benefit of her friendly smiles.

Altogether, the hour before tea passed pleasantly enough. The conversation grew general, and was kept so: to several of the party this proved a relief. Phillis and Maurice were in high spirits, as there was plenty of laughter and jesting. Aunt Conyngham watched the graceful girl with sternly critical eyes, and could not avoid admitting to herself that she had never seen a more charming creature. But the reflection did not soften her in the least: she had meant Maurice to marry Lady Dacre's cousin, and to be obliged to relinquish any cherished plan was a sore cross to her autocratic disposition.

It was dreadful to her to think that she must sit helpless and let Maurice, if he chose, commit the folly of marrying this unknown girl, over whom would hang the stigma of having made butter and sold eggs! She could hear her friends tormenting her with slighting speeches, troublesome questions, and Sibyl Mayford's accounts of the farm, and Phillis's life there! And Phillis would be her niece,—hers, Aunt Conyngham's, who was as absurdly proud of her birth and blood as if she had been a Bourbon, instead of a woman born and bred in a republic.

But Maurice would marry her if he wished; as well try to stop a whirlwind as him when bent on following out a caprice! If there were anything she could do,—any prejudicial discovery she could make in regard to Phillis! But she recognized the folly of this wish: the girl was a good girl; her young life could hold no mystery. Most probably, no experience in the slightest degree eventful had ever come near her, until this freak of fate to throw in her path the romance which, to Aunt Conyngham, resembled a modernized version of King Cophetua and the beggar-maid.

Her horror and disgust at Maurice's avowal so fully occupied her, that for the time she almost forgot Georgia's unsatisfactory conduct. Then, too, she trusted in her own influence over her niece, and she had none whatever with her nephew; nobody had! And she had been so proud of him,—so fond of him! and now he was bent on disappointing her hopes! He would bitterly regret it, when too late; the girl

would regret it too: oh, if there were any way of convincing Phillis of that! But there was the danger of Maurice's discovering if she meddled, and his wrath would be unappeasable. She could not endure the thought of losing Maurice out of her life: he had been the sole weakness therein since his childhood. She had remained calm enough in her affection for everybody else, from her husband to Georgia, but she adored her nephew, and she knew his temper, and she was helpless,—oh, that was the hardest—helpless!

Towards the hour at which the carriage had been ordered to return for the visitors, Cinders came to say that Patrick was in the kitchen, and wished to speak with Mr. Bourke.

"What can the old fellow want?" said Maurice.

"I've not the least idea," replied Denis. "Something the matter with one of the horses, perhaps."

He went out of the room, and was gone for some minutes. When he returned he looked so disturbed that everybody noticed it: and Maurice said,—

"Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Nothing of consequence," he answered.

"Is Ferguson worse?" Maurice asked.

"Has been all day," Denis responded, laconically.

Maurice knew that the old man had been seriously ailing for a week, and his thought was that the laborer had died suddenly, and Bourke did not wish to risk disturbing Mrs. Mayford's nerves by revealing the fact: so Peyton asked no more questions.

Denis uttered his farewell somewhat hurriedly, and took his departure.

He had not long been gone when the carriage drove up to the gate. But a stupid blunder had occurred: instead of sending the commodious vehicle of the morning, the livery-man had sent a small carriage in which Mrs. Mayford would have to sit upright; and Mrs. Conyngham declared that the fatigue would be too great after the unusual exertion of the day; and there was, besides, danger that the lame ankle might receive some fresh injury.

"But it will be very late before the man can drive to Wachuset and get back with the other carriage," Mr. Caruthers expostulated.

Grandma said at once,—

"Mrs. Mayford must not think of going to-night."

"Certainly not," added Phillis. "There is a bedroom on the ground-floor, Mrs. Mayford: we can make you perfectly comfortable. Please consider yourself disposed of."

Mrs. Mayford made a few difficulties,—not because she cared particularly about being obliged to remain, but because it was her habit always to make difficulties, and she wanted Mr. Caruthers to feel that he was to blame. However, Mrs. Conyngham took the matter into her own hands. Sibyl must stop! So the invalid thanked grandma and Phillis, expressed unnecessary contrition for causing so much trouble, and then Aunt Conyngham and Mr. Caruthers drove off.

Maurice and Cinders helped Mrs. Mayford to the room near grandma's, quickly put in readiness; and as both girls were occupied with the widow,—likely to be for the next hour, Georgia told him,—and grandma had at once gone to bed, Peyton said good-night and departed.

As Georgia had predicted, it took a long while to dispose of the invalid; and this accomplished, the girls went up to their rooms.

"Mr. Bourke looked very odd and troubled," Georgia said, as they were about to separate. "I hope there was nothing serious the matter."

"Probably your brother was right in what he told us as he was going away. I dare say poor old Ferguson is dead, and Denis did not want to explain before Mrs. Mayford."

Georgia said nothing more, but the explanation did not satisfy her. The distress in Denis Bourke's face had not been the shock of surprise at hearing of a death; nor could Ferguson's dying cause regret, for he had suffered a great deal, and death was a blessed release. No, something had happened,—some blow which affected Bourke personally,—deeply too,—and Georgia could not put the conviction out of her mind. By and by, as she sat thinking instead of preparing for bed, she recollected that her sympathy and anxiety was only another proof of the depth of her feeling for Denis. The bare idea that some trouble had come to him roused such a desire to share it, that she was frightened; reason would lose all power to control her heart if he were in trouble.

Mrs. Mayford did not go to sleep; she was restless after the unusual excitement of her drive, and she lay thinking,

—of Georgia and Mr. Caruthers, of her failure in producing an impression on that gentleman, of Phillis French, whom she had begun actively to hate, because the means, though innocently, of her enduring humiliation. Mrs. Conyngham's victory rankled in her mind, and the fact of having been obliged to apologize to Maurice Peyton was gall and wormwood to her.

As she lay on her bed, busy with these reflections, a step sounded beneath her window. She was horribly frightened, and swift visions of midnight robbers flashed across her cowardly soul. As she stretched out her hand to seize the hand-bell, meaning while she rang it to shriek with all her might until assistance came, she heard a voice call softly,—

"Phillis! Phillis!"

She half raised herself and waited; a little shower of gravel was flung against the window above hers,—the window of Miss French's room, she knew, for Phillis had told her that she occupied the chamber overhead. She fairly held her breath to listen, heard Miss French cautiously cross the floor in an instant, heard her say,—

"Denis, is that you?"

"Yes," Bourke answered. "Come down,—quick!"

"Hush," Phillis said. "I'll come."

No more words passed; Bourke walked away from the case-ment. She could hear Phillis moving about for a few seconds; then came the sound of a door opening and closing, then a light tread on the stairs.

Sibyl Mayford's heart gave a bound of malicious delight. Phillis French going to meet the young Irishman at that hour! Here was her longed-for opportunity: she could punish the girl, and avenge herself on Peyton. Although the effort cost her excruciating agony, she managed to get out of bed and crawl to the open window. The blinds screened her, and an easy-chair stood near, into which she sank with a smothered groan. But the physical pain only added to the eagerness of her malice. She felt as if it were Miss French's fault that she had to endure it.

She peered eagerly through the *persiennes*. The moon cast a flood of silver light about, which rendered every object as distinctly visible as if it had been day. She heard Denis Bourke's voice,—heard another man's in reply, though she could not catch the words. Presently Phillis appeared round the

corner of the house; then she saw Bourke hurry out from a thicket of lilac-bushes and join her. Phillis was wringing her hands, and her face looked ghastly in the moonbeams. Bourke was evidently trying to comfort her, and very soon the girl recovered her self-control. The pair moved towards the garden. Mrs. Mayford saw a man join them, then the three disappeared.

Instead of going home, Peyton had wandered down to the lake and strayed about its margin, dreaming of Phillis and the new hopes which his great love had so unexpectedly brought into his life. At last he turned and walked through the wood towards the Nest, yielding to an impulse like that which had led him to Mrs. Plummer's house the night little Miranda died.

He opened the gate and entered the grounds. Suddenly he caught the sound of footsteps behind the lilac-trees. He stepped quickly forward and met Denis Bourke; a little farther back stood Phillis.

"You here!" he exclaimed, in a tone of mingled wonder and anger. "And—and Miss French!"

"Is it your affair?" returned Phillis, passionately.

Before Peyton or Bourke could speak, Georgia's voice called,—

"Maurice, is that you?"

She emerged into the moonlight, went up to Phillis, and put her arm about her friend's waist. She could feel the girl tremble in every limb, and her eyes fastened on Georgia with an expression of unutterable anguish; but Maurice could not see this, for she had turned her back on him.

"Upon my word, you are all indulging in a late promenade," cried Maurice, trying to laugh, relieved by the fact of Georgia's presence from some vague, wrathful suspicion which had had no time to develop itself, and a little confused by the necessity for accounting for his own presence.

Georgia had not been long in her room when she recollected having left an unread letter on Phillis's table. Certain that her friend had not yet gone to bed, she decided to seek her epistle. She crossed the hall on tiptoe, and opened Phillis's door: the room was empty. Phillis must have remembered some neglected duty; the hen-house was not shut, or the turkeys were out, and with her usual promptitude she had flown off to attend to matters. Georgia determined to follow; perhaps she would be of assistance; at all events she was not

sleepy, and was glad of a pretext to stray about in the moonlight.

She stepped back into her chamber, threw a shawl over her head, and went down-stairs, candle in hand. The side-door was ajar; she passed out on the lawn. She could see nothing of Phillis, and moved towards the garden. As she neared the thicket she saw a man hurry off in the opposite direction, and an instant after caught sight of Phillis and Bourke. Before she could call to them she perceived Maurice, heard his angry, startled exclamation, and ran forward, her first thought being to give Phillis the support of her presence.

A brief pause followed Peyton's last words, then Bourke said,—

"Poor old Ferguson is dead, Maurice!"

"Well, I think you might have waited till morning to come and tell the news," replied Maurice, irritably. "I suppose these young women were poetizing in the moonlight. Really, Georgia, with your delicate throat, you ought to be more careful. Miss French, I thought you a better guardian."

"I am not your sister's guardian, nor is she mine, nor do I mean to have one," cried Phillis.

"I beg your pardon. Of course I was only jesting," Maurice said, penitently.

Georgia knew that Phillis was angry at the suspicion betrayed in her brother's first speech, but something else ailed the girl; she was distressed and frightened.

"You seem to have been in a poetical mood yourself, Maurice," said Georgia, endeavoring to speak playfully. "We thought you were safe at home long ago."

"It seemed a shame to shut one's self up such a beautiful night," returned Peyton, laughing somewhat confusedly, still trying to catch a glimpse of Phillis's face, which was carefully averted, alarmed and conscience-stricken by the fear that he had deeply offended her.

"Send them both away; I can't bear any more," Phillis whispered in Georgia's ear.

This appeal had no reference to her irritation against Peyton. Georgia comprehended that. This was the culmination of the mystery in Phillis's life, which her friend had so long suspected and had tried so hard to believe a mere fancy of her own.

"We will go and see Ferguson's wife in the morning, Mr. Bourke," she said. "It is bedtime; so we must bid you two gentlemen good-night."

She held out her hand to him with a frank smile; he knew there was no cloud between them, no suspicion in her loyal mind: whatever Phillis chose to tell or withhold, could not change her sentiments towards either.

"Then we'll be off," said Denis. "Good-night, Miss Phillis."

"Good-night," she replied, glancing uneasily around.

"And may I not be spoken to?" asked Maurice.

"Pleasant dreams," she said, after a moment's hesitation, and walked away.

Maurice was following, but Georgia laid her hand on his arm.

"Go home. Good-night," she whispered, and hastened after her friend.

The two entered the house, and stole softly up-stairs. Georgia drew Phillis into her room, and shut the door; the lamp-light showed her face so drawn and white that Miss Grosvenor was terrified.

"You know you can trust me, Phil," she said. "You promised once that if ever I could help you, you would let me. Has the time come?"

"Yes," Phillis answered, standing before her, rigid and pale. "It has come. I am going to tell you everything."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE two men walked towards Bourke's house.

"If Mrs. Mayford happened to hear your voice, she will make us a nice blow-up with the aunt," grumbled Maurice.

"Mrs. Mayford?—where is she?"

"In the ground-floor bedroom. The liveryman sent the wrong carriage, so that Witch of Endor had to stop all night."

Denis knew that she must have heard him call Phillis; he could only hope that she had not caught another voice, though

he remembered that the person who accompanied him had spoken, but they were not very near the window at the time.

Nothing more was said about the matter: Maurice's thoughts were fully occupied by the fear that his first angry, suspicious words had offended Phillis.

The next morning Peyton did not rise until somewhat after his usual hour, for he had scarcely slept. He woke suddenly from the uneasy slumber into which he had fallen after day-break; Phillis's voice seemed ringing in his ears. The impression was so strong that he sprang out of the bed, ran to the open window, and peeped through the blinds. He only saw Denis Bourke coming across the lawn from the zigzag path. He had been dreaming of her, doubtless: of course it was absurd to have supposed she would be up at the house at that hour.

When he went down-stairs, almost the first words Bourke said were,—

"I hate mysteries, Maurice, but I've got a visitor for a couple of days. He will keep to his room, and we won't speak of his being here to anybody. The trio in the kitchen are safe not to talk."

Peyton thought it beyond a doubt that Denis was hiding some man falsely accused of being a Molly Maguire and unable at present to clear himself, as had already once happened: so he only answered,—

"All right! You'll land in prison one of these days, old Don Quixote!"

Bourke had waited breakfast, and they sat down to it, Maurice making no allusion to the little scene in the garden. He feared Denis might tell him that Phillis would have reason to be incensed by his words and tone, and that no doubt she was.

While they were still at table, Joe Grimshaw entered.

"Mr. Peyton," he said, "your sister is down by the pond: she wants to know if you won't go for a walk with her."

"Will you come too, Denis?" asked Maurice, as he rose and lighted his cigar, preparatory to starting.

"Can't," said Denis; "I've something to do. Stop here, Joe: I want you."

"I'm all hunky, Mr. Bourke," Joe replied, with equal irreverence and good will.

Maurice descended the zigzags, and found Georgia by the lake.

"Never call me lazy again!" she said, as he kissed her. "Good-morning. It is only a little after eight o'clock."

"You look pale," returned he. "Aren't you well?"

"Only so-so. 'Jist tol'able,' as the negroes say."

"Where is P. French?"

"Gone to see poor Mrs. Ferguson. She wouldn't take me with her, because she said it would only distress me uselessly; she is always having some kind thought."

"Was she angry with me last night?"

"She has not mentioned it."

"Well, it was late for you to be there!"

"Nonsense, Maurice! As if we didn't often sit out till midnight," Georgia answered, relieved by the certainty that her brother had no suspicion that anybody besides herself and Bourke had been with Phillis. But she had a matter of weight upon her mind, and must get rid of it. "I want to ask a favor of you," she cried, abruptly.

"Granted,—to the half of my kingdom," he replied, playfully.

The money which fell to her share when her brother and Aunt Conyngham sold the houses in town had been employed by Georgia to pay her debts, and she had determined never to have any more as long as she lived. Phillis needed money immediately,—that very day,—and, supposing Georgia still possessed those unexpected gains at her banker's, asked the loan she required. The request had been acceded to with affectionate heartiness, and Georgia congratulated herself on the fact that she had never happened to tell her friend of the use to which she had put her "fairy gold," as they had laughingly styled it, else, as Phillis knew what her income was, she would have known that Georgia could not accommodate her without applying to Maurice, and even in this exigency the girl would not have permitted her to do so.

It was a great humiliation, this necessity for borrowing of her brother, but Phillis's need was so urgent that she could not hesitate, though no personal strait, however terrible, would ever have forced Georgia to touch a penny from the fortune Maurice's father had left, with such insulting conditions attached, where her mother was concerned.

"Aren't you going to tell what this wonderful request is?" asked Maurice, as she stood nervously playing with the buttons of his coat. "It can't be anything so very dreadful, that you need hesitate and turn red and white! I don't suppose you require the head of an enemy or an admirer either."

"No, no!" she answered, trying to laugh. She paused an instant longer; the words she must speak seemed fairly to choke her; but it was for her friend: what mattered any hurt to her abominable pride in that cause? And, animated by this reflection, she said, quickly, "I want—Maurice, I want some money."

Nothing could have surprised him more than this demand. Since she was a very young girl he had not ventured to offer her any; she had told him that she would rather go hungry than accept it, and if they were to remain friends he must never ask her to do so,—never even offer her a present more expensive than her means enabled her to make him. He perceived by her face and voice how difficult she found it to utter her request. She must have been actually persecuted by some importunate creditor before she resorted to this step. But he was only too thankful that she had come to him, and hastened to say, in an indifferent voice,—

"Bless me, is that all! How much, Pussy?"

"You see I have spent mine: I told you I wanted to get out of debt. Oh, I'll never be extravagant again!" she cried. "I shall pay it back: it will take some time, but—"

"Don't be a Georgian goose!" he interrupted, passing his arm about her waist and drawing her towards him, in order to kiss her forehead. "How much do you want, Honey-pots?"

"Eighteen hundred dollars."

"I've my bank-book in my pocket," he said; "we will go on to the Nest, and I'll write you a check, so that you can send it off by the noon post."

This did not suit Georgia's purpose; she could not give Phillis the check bearing Maurice's signature; but she reflected that she could cash it at the Wachuset Bank. Maurice had funds enough by him, so that he would not be obliged to go there, and consequently would not learn that she had drawn the money and conceive any suspicion that it had not been asked for personal needs.

"It is so good of you!" she exclaimed. "I can't tell you how obliged I am."

"Nonsense! if you say a word more I shall turn rusty, and then we are sure to quarrel," he answered. "Come on to the house. Now, mind, you are not to allow P. French to be cross with me. I'm afraid she was."

"Oh, she will have forgotten it by this time," Georgia replied, but, cheerfully as she spoke, the painful thought which had haunted her during the night started up with fresh bitterness. There was a terrible blow in store for her brother. If he persisted in his love, he must be told Phillis's secret. Oh, poor Phillis!—poor Maurice! How hard life was,—what fiendish satisfaction fate seemed to find in tormenting everything human!

But she must get away from this trouble; she should lose all show of composure else, and convince her brother that her agitation was not caused solely by the hurt to her pride, involved in the necessity of seeking pecuniary aid.

Luckily, Maurice was in one of his gayest moods, and therefore she could easily set him talking merry nonsense. When they reached the house, they went into the sitting-room; he wrote the check and handed it to her.

"I suppose the Mayford is still asleep," he said; "but where is the blessed old grandma?"

"She is in bed too; she is not well this morning, and Phil persuaded her to keep quiet. It is nothing serious: she got too tired yesterday," Georgia explained.

He walked into the porch, and she followed.

"I should think Miss French meant to stop all day with Mrs. Ferguson," he said, impatiently. "It is nine o'clock already."

The bank would be open: Georgia wanted to draw the money and return before her aunt and Mr. Caruthers arrived to escort the invalid home.

"I shall go for a ride: will you come too, Maurice?" she asked, presently, certain she ran no risk of his consenting; he would not leave the house until he had seen Phillis.

"Oh, I should keep you waiting while I sent Sykes up to the Den for my horse," he said.

"That would make it too late; I must be here when the aunt comes," returned Georgia. "You can sit still and I

lazy. I shall put on my habit, and have Cinders tell Mr. Sykes to saddle my gallant steed."

She ran off, and by the time she reappeared her horse was waiting. She rode to the town and settled her business. When she got back, Phillis was standing in the veranda. Dan Sykes came to take the horse, and the two girls went upstairs.

"Here is the money, Phil dear," Georgia said, as soon as they were in her room, "in bank-notes. It was better not to give a check."

"You think of everything," Phillis said. "Oh, Georgia, Georgia, how good you are to me!" She leaned her head on her friend's shoulder, and sighed wearily. She looked pale, and the pupils of her eyes were unnaturally dilated, but there was no trace of excitement in her manner.

"Did you go to the Den?" Georgia asked.

"Yes; I met Denis when I was coming away from Mrs. Ferguson's house: he told me your brother had gone out."

Georgia asked no question about the interview the girl had held with Bourke's visitor; she just held her close in her arms for a few seconds, knowing that such silent comfort would be most acceptable.

"Was Maurice here when you got back?" she asked, presently.

"Yes; but Cinders told me, and I hid: he got tired of waiting, and went off," Phillis replied. "You must change your dress, Georgia."

"Is Mrs. Mayford awake yet?" she inquired, as she began unbuttoning her riding-habit.

"Cinders has just carried in her breakfast. I sent to ask if I could play lady's-maid, but she declined to trouble me," said Phillis: "she has Cinders, though."

"And is sure to have her ball of pearl powder in her pocket, so she will do well enough," rejoined Georgia. "Lock the money up in my desk till you want it," she added, taking a sealed envelope out of her pocket and laying it on the table.

"Oh, Georgia, Georgia, what a blessing for me that you had it!" cried Phillis, as she obeyed her friend's directions.

"And now we need not think about it again! You look so tired, Phil!"

"Do I?" she asked, with a painful smile.

"But to-morrow everything will be over," continued Georgia; "your—Mr. Bourke's visitor will go, and you can feel tranquil once more."

"About as tranquil as a haunted person that knows the ghost will come back sooner or later," replied Phillis.

"Oh, my poor darling!" cried Georgia, flinging both arms about her again.

"Don't!" Phillis said, pushing her gently away. "You mustn't pity me. I want all my strength."

"Yes, I know, I know!" sighed Georgia.

Phillis sat down by the table, and leaned her head on her hand, absently watching Miss Grosvenor, who had returned to the duties of her toilet. There was silence between them for a while; at length Phillis said,—

"Grandma is asleep. She promised me that she would not get up till towards evening; but she is not really ill."

At that moment they heard Denis Bourke's voice in the hall, speaking to Cinders.

"Ask Miss French if I can see her at once," he said.

"Something has happened!" whispered Phillis, starting to her feet. For a moment she trembled so violently that she could hardly stand, but she waved Georgia off when she tried to support her. "This won't do," she said, with a spectral attempt at her usual manner, which set Georgia crying; "P. French mustn't fail me now: time enough to play baby when it's all over." She walked steadily to the door, and looked back to add, "You'd better come: I may want you."

Georgia dried her eyes and followed. When they entered the room where Bourke was waiting, Phillis was the calmest of the three. He put down a great-coat and valise as they appeared, and came forward, closing the door behind them.

"I am going to Philadelphia," he said.

"No, no! not to-day!" exclaimed Georgia, before she knew what she was saying; "not till—till—"

"Hush!" interrupted Phillis. "Don't you understand?—something has happened. Quick, Denis, quick!"

He pulled a newspaper from his pocket, saying,—

"It's of no use to keep it from you. There's a paragraph about his having been seen on his way north. He must get off by Philadelphia. I can manage it, but I must go there

first. I'll be back to-morrow evening by the last train. I'm afraid I can't come sooner. He can start the day after, and, indeed, he is suffering so much that he needs rest."

"Yes, and must have it. Let me read the paragraph, Denis," was all Phillis said.

"It can do no good—"

"Do you suppose anything can hurt me?" she broke in, seizing the journal. She read the article to which Bourke pointed, shuddering a little, but her face was firm. "Will he be safe here?" she asked.

"He could not be in a safer place: he took such a round-about route, that there's no danger of his being traced," Bourke answered. "Don't be frightened, Phillis; but I know how brave you will be!"

"Does Maurice know you are going?" Georgia asked.

"Yes, I met him: he has gone to the station to wait for me."

"Good-by, Denis," said Phillis. "I can't thank you—I—"

She laid her hand on his shoulder for an instant, struggled in vain to speak, then hurried from the room.

"Thank God she has you with her!" exclaimed Bourke, turning towards Georgia, a smile of infinite tenderness softening his troubled face. "I must go now! Georgia—Georgia—can't you say a word,—one word?"

It seemed to the girl as if the whole of her old world were sweeping out of sight, leaving her alone with this man in a new! His arms were extended; the eager love in his eyes was a dazzling light that fairly blinded her. Oh, what would life be without her dream? Why doubt? why struggle? Could any destiny be so hard as existence deprived of his affection? How could she bear to give him up? She must, though,—she must; she must end it now and here! Yet, even as she was trying to think this, he cried again,—

"Georgia—Georgia!"

He was coming nearer; she could not bid him pause; in another instant he would take her in his embrace. If he did, she should have no strength to resist. She should speak the word that would give him a right to claim her, and, once spoken, she knew that he would never let her take it back.

"No, no!" she faltered,—saw Bourke's face change,—his arms drop,—and at the same moment she heard her aunt's voice exclaim, "Georgia Grosvenor!"

She turned, and saw Mrs. Conyngham standing in the window that opened to the floor of the porch. In the distance sounded the railway-whistle, sharp and shrill. Bourke had not a second to lose; he caught Georgia's hands, pressed his lips on them, snatched up his coat and valise, and dashed past Mrs. Conyngham with a hasty salutation to which she paid no heed beyond an angry glare from two fierce eyes which, as he hurried by, fixed themselves again upon her niece.

"Georgia Grosvenor!" she exclaimed a second time.

Desperation nerved Georgia: the secret must be told now.

"Good-morning, aunt," she said, with a composure which astonished herself. She could not be angry, stern and wrathful as *was* the countenance that met hers. She felt grateful to her relative for this opportune arrival; she had been saved from her own heart: she should never be so weak again.

"I did not hear you come," she added.

"Too pleasantly occupied," sneered Mrs. Conyngham.

"Too seriously occupied, at least," Georgia answered. She might have shrunk from anger, and so allowed her aunt to get the advantage, but the sneer and the sudden look of contempt gave her a little strength.

"So it should seem," returned Aunt Conyngham, forsaking scorn for a majesty which was really quite awful. She entered the room, closed the window behind her, and sat down, still fixing her niece with that stony glare, and poor Georgia had a swift, vague thought that her feelings must be somewhat akin to those of a criminal in the dock when he sees the judge don his fatal black cap. "And now you will be good enough to explain the meaning of the extraordinary scene I interrupted," pursued Mrs. Conyngham, in her deepest, sternest voice, which gave Georgia, in her trouble, the sensation it used to do in the days of her opening girlhood when she stood awaiting sentence for some misdemeanor at Aunt Conyngham's bar of justice. "This very disgraceful scene!" added the lady, noticing her niece's confusion, and venturing on a harsher blow.

But she had made a mistake,—gone too far: she perceived that before the words had fairly left her lips.

Georgia moved towards her with a face which startled her aunt.

"Take back those words!" she said.

Mrs. Conyngham struggled hard to look her down, but she felt herself cower before the wrathful splendor of Georgia's eyes.

"I believe you are crazy!" she exclaimed.

"Take back those words," repeated Georgia, "or you and I may both have reason to think me so. Take them back!"

"I do! I didn't mean it!" cried Aunt Conyngham. She covered her face with her handkerchief, and sobbed out, "You have broken my heart at last. Oh, I thank God your poor mother is in her grave!"

"So do I," said Georgia; "at least she is spared hearing her sister insult her child."

She was forced to sit; she trembled so that she could not stand. Anger, thankfulness that she had had no time to pronounce the word Denis wanted, a wild regret which burned her heart like flame to remember that she must give up her dream, render him and herself wretched, a mad impatience against fate, against her own lack of courage, of honesty, of womanliness in not being brave enough to let her heart have its way,—all these varying emotions left her positively faint and blind.

Mrs. Conyngham, watching her from behind the screen of her pocket-handkerchief, was sufficiently keen and shrewd to gain some perception of the struggle in her mind and to try and turn it to suit her own purpose. She was scarcely less moved than Georgia, for after her first spasm of rage had come the harrowing thought that there had been grounds for Sibyl Mayford's hints,—Denis Bourke was dangerous. The bare idea that Georgia could be insane enough to care for him—to think of flinging away her brilliant future—gave Mrs. Conyngham a pang of heart-sickness almost like despair.

"Child, child," she exclaimed, in a pleading voice, "this is no time for you and me to quarrel! In heaven's name tell me what it all means, and let me help you."

"I don't want any help," Georgia answered, forcing back a sob. This approach to tenderness unnerved her completely.

"At least you will explain; you must have enough sense of duty left to do that—" Mrs. Conyngham broke off,—the

choice of words was unfortunate,—and began again: “You will grant so much, Georgia, to my affection.”

“You know I shall never resist that claim, aunt,” Georgia replied.

Another and still safer mode of treating the matter struck the astute lady. She rose, went up to Georgia, and stood behind her chair, laying her hand on the girl’s head, and saying, in a voice which she tried to render at once half playful and wholly sympathizing,—

“My dear, I understand without any more words. That foolish Mr. Bourke has been falling in love with you. It is not your fault. I know you are sorry for him. I know you did not think; so you must not reproach yourself! He has been crazy enough to speak, and it has frightened you and made you feel guilty. Ah, I wish you had given him a hint long ago of your engagement to Mr. Caruthers.”

When she began to speak, Georgia let her head drop back against her aunt’s shoulder with a sensation of relief. She meant to be kind, and so would prove a help; but the words which ended the speech caused Georgia to start up with quick determination, while her trembling features grew hard again.

“I could have no reason for telling Mr. Bourke a falsehood,” she said. “I never was engaged to Mr. Caruthers. I never gave him the slightest reason to hope that I ever should be.”

“No reason to hope!” cried Mrs. Conyngham, her anger rising anew. “What else did your taking months to consider his proposal mean? You tacitly engaged yourself to him: to retract now would be wanton trifling, a deliberate sin; you are bound in honor to accept his hand.”

“He understood from the first I was not pledged in any way. I told him there was no probability of my ever changing my mind.”

“Ask him. Let us hear what he thinks.”

“He has told me,” Georgia answered, quietly. She knew the moment had come when her aunt must hear the whole: the crisis gave her a certain composure.

“Oh, he has too much patience!” cried Aunt Conyngham. “I know he is willing to give you more time; but it is wicked on your part to ask it. How you can treat him as you do, if you have any heart in your bosom, is a mystery to me.”

"You are mistaken," said Georgia, coldly. "I have told Mr. Caruthers that I shall never marry him; but that has not disturbed our friendship."

Mrs. Conyngham dropped into a chair, and sat staring at her with dazed, confused eyes: she positively could not believe her own ears.

"You mean you have told him you can't yet make up your mind," she said, slowly.

"My mind was made up weeks back; almost as soon as it was, I told Mr. Caruthers that we could be friends, and only friends! I shall never marry him; the matter was definitely settled between us a good while since."

Aunt Conyngham was convinced; for the moment she could not speak; she gave one groan, and sat still.

"I hated to tell you," continued Georgia, really pitying her relative's terrible disappointment. "We both agreed to wait till we got to town; but it is told now, and, aunt, you must understand that the subject is at an end forever."

A brief silence ensued; Georgia knew that no disappointment could have been severer to her aunt than the overthrow of her long-cherished hope, and she would have given the world to offer some comforting words, but could find none.

The first numbness produced by the shock subsided; Mrs. Conyngham rushed into a passion, such as Georgia had never seen her display.

"You abominable girl!" she exclaimed. "You wicked, wicked creature! Georgia Grosvenor, if you dare to add to your iniquity by telling me that you are so mad as to care for that beggarly Irishman—"

"Don't go any further!" interrupted Georgia.

"You will kill me!" sobbed Mrs. Conyngham. "If you tell me you are so crazy as to even dream of marrying him, you will kill me!"

"Set your mind at rest: I shall never marry Mr. Bourke," Georgia answered, deliberately and firmly, though to hear her voice uttering the sentence aloud roused a pang of anguish in her heart which turned her dizzy and sick.

"Have you told him?" Mrs. Conyngham gasped, with a slight feeling of relief.

"I shall say nothing more about Mr. Bourke," said Georgia; "and, aunt, whatever secret of his you may suspect, you must

betray to no human being. I warn you, I should not forgive it."

"You need not threaten me!" returned Mrs. Conyngham, recovering herself enough to be reproachful in a dignified fashion; "I am not likely to allow anybody to suspect that he ever presumed so far as to care for you."

"Excuse me, aunt, but Mr. Bourke's birth and education make that remark perfectly ludicrous," said Georgia. "However, we will not discuss him in any way; your sole interest is where I am concerned; I have no thought of marrying him."

And again that dolorous pang wrung her heart as she spoke his sentence—ah, and hers—hers!

Mrs. Conyngham shed a few tears, partly because she was nervous, partly because a little weeping seemed a necessary preparation to getting down to more commonplace conversation. Her ready mind grasped a plan before she had dried her eyes: the important thing was to get Georgia away at once.

"I have had news from town," she said, putting her handkerchief aside, and speaking with tolerable calmness. "I must go back. The business is important: I want to go to-morrow."

Georgia knew that it would be wisdom on her part to consent; but she could not leave Phillis at this juncture.

"Not to-morrow," she said; "Mrs. Davis is unwell. I cannot leave Phillis till she is better."

"You have put everything out of my head by your dreadful talk!" cried Aunt Conyngham. "I've not even asked after Sibyl Mayford."

"Report says she spent a good night. I have not seen her myself."

"Is she ready? I have come to take her back."

"I will show you to her room. She will see you, doubtless. I fancy she is ready."

As they passed down the hall they met Phillis, who had come out of Mrs. Mayford's chamber. The sight of the girl roused new anger in Aunt Conyngham's mind: to have Maurice's insanity added to Georgia's crimes, seemed too much for endurance. But she was obliged to be cordial, for fear Maurice should hear of it, and asked with great interest after the grandmother.

"She is only tired," Phillis said: "she will be quite herself by evening."

"I am so glad! I am obliged to go to town to-morrow on important business. Of course Georgia must go too, and she hated the idea of leaving you if there was any fear of your grandmother's being ill."

"I don't mean to go to-morrow, Phil," said Georgia.

"You nonsensical child!" exclaimed Mrs. Conyngham, with a nervous laugh. "You must go, and Maurice too: the business is partly his."

Georgia saw an expression of relief cross Phillis's face; but they were at Mrs. Mayford's door, and she did not speak.

The widow received her friend rapturously, insisted on Georgia's coming in, and was so sweet to her and Phillis that if there had been any possible mischief for the creature to work, Georgia could have sworn she was contemplating it.

She vowed she had never rested better in her life,—had fallen asleep the moment her head touched the pillow, and her ankle really seemed benefited by the exertion of the previous day: with the aid of a stick she could walk across the room. Her placidity was even proof against the annoyance of learning that Mr. Caruthers had allowed some business matter to prevent his coming to see her home.

"If you are so strong and energetic, you will be able to start for town to-morrow," said Mrs. Conyngham. "It is lucky, because we are obliged to go."

"All of you?" asked the widow.

"Yes; Mr. Caruthers has news too," said Mrs. Conyngham, and, as she had expected, it was evident this information at once decided the lady to find strength to depart also.

Georgia persisted in her intention of remaining, but Aunt Conyngham still treated this as a jest. She had encountered Maurice near the station, and he told her that he should ride over to Wachuset after seeing Bourke off; she trusted to convincing him of the necessity for inducing Georgia to leave the Nest before that gentleman's return, and believed that the wayward girl could not resist her brother's persuasions.

When the visitors had gone, Phillis said,—

"I must go up to Denis's house, Georgia. Look in now and then on grandma; but don't stop, because she ought to sleep."

"Must you go, Phil?"

"Yes; this is my best opportunity: your brother won't be back for a couple of hours. I must go; I could only stay a few moments this morning, and I fear that—he—is very ill. I must go."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AFTER the train had gone, Peyton rode over to Wachuset, partly to fulfil a commission for his friend, but more to pass the time until Phillis's afternoon leisure should give him an opportunity to see her alone.

As he entered the town his horse cast a shoe, so he left him at a blacksmith's shop, receiving a promise that the roan should be conducted to the hotel when the misfortune had been repaired.

Maurice attended to Bourke's business, which detained him until it was close upon the hour at which his aunt had told him she should return.

He met the president of the bank, who stopped to exchange salutations, and added,—

"I had the honor of a visit from Miss Grosvenor this morning; she came in herself to cash your check. If she means to distribute that among our poor people, on the top of what you and she have already given, you two will have indeed been a Providence in our neighborhood."

After a few more words Peyton passed on, thinking what a very odd thing it was for Georgia to have drawn the money; he had supposed that she wanted to send the check to town in payment of some bill. Certainly she could not afford to bestow in charity even a quarter of the amount; and the idea of keeping so many hundred dollars by her in a place where opportunities for spending money were fewer than in any spot he had ever discovered, seemed utterly preposterous.

But he was near the hotel, and the sight of the carriage driving up, with Mrs. Conyngham and the widow therein, put the matter out of his mind. He hurried forward to assist them to alight and help Mrs. Mayford up to her room. It needed only one glance at his aunt's face to perceive that she

was in a state of intense excitement, but, as the widow appeared unusually gay and satisfied, he concluded that she had been worrying his relative beyond the bounds of patience,—probably by abuse of Georgia and himself.

As soon as Mrs. Mayford was comfortably established on her sofa, Aunt Conyngham said,—

“Now we must leave you to rest for a while. I will send Rosalie in: I want to speak to Maurice for a few moments.”

“Good-by, you naughty boy,” said the widow, in her softest, most languid tones. “I thought pretty Miss French looking pale this morning. I hope you have not begun tormenting her already. I am sure, just at present, she has enough to disturb her without any help on your part.”

As soon as they were in the corridor, and the door of her chamber closed behind them, Maurice exclaimed,—

“By Jove, Aunt Conyngham, you will either have to clip that cat’s claws, or if you persist in keeping her about, she will drive everybody else away from your vicinity.”

“There are worse things than sharp speeches to endure in this world,” replied Mrs. Conyngham, in a voice full of meaning.

Maurice knew there was a storm in the air, and hastily decided that if his relative meant to expostulate or lecture, she had chosen her time very ill; he felt too anxious and impatient this morning to bear interference upon any subject.

They found Rosalie in Mrs. Conyngham’s parlor, and her mistress bade her go to the invalid’s room.

“Ask first if Mr. Caruthers has come in,” she added, “and desire him not to leave the house till I have seen him.”

Maurice smiled privately at his aunt’s tone and manner, but seated himself in an easy-chair, and waited. Rosalie took her departure. Mrs. Conyngham threw off her bonnet and shawl, sat down opposite her nephew, and regarded him with her most solemn expression.

“May I have a cigarette?” he asked, apparently unobservant of her looks. She made a gesture of assent, waited an instant, still fixing him with dismayed and horrified eyes, but as it became evident he did not mean to ask the cause of her agitation, she said, in a trembling voice,—

“I hardly know where to begin! Never, never in my life have I passed a morning so dreadful!”

"I should think your long experience of the Mayford would have accustomed you to annoyances," said Maurice, lazily puffing a cloud of white smoke into the air.

"Don't jest, Maurice; by the time I finish I think you will feel as little inclined to as I do myself!" she exclaimed. "Do you know what Georgia has done?"

"No," said Maurice.

"She has refused Mr. Caruthers,—refused him!" groaned Aunt Conyngham.

Maurice was surprised, but he was thinking more of Phillis's perspicacity than anything else. He had not believed her correct the day she had insisted that Georgia had done so.

"It seems a pity in many ways," he said, slowly; "but, aunt, if she can't make up her mind to like him—"

"Oh!" broke in Mrs. Conyngham, with profound disdain, "don't begin that romantic rubbish you have lately learned to talk: you don't mean it, and at bottom you know you do not. For you to amuse yourself is one thing; to sit by and permit your sister to wreck her future is another."

"I don't see that refusing Mr. Caruthers must necessarily involve that catastrophe," returned Maurice, obstinately.

This insinuation in regard to the lightness of his feeling for Phillis angered him, but he resolved not to gratify his relative by showing it.

"Do you know why she has refused him?" demanded Mrs. Conyngham.

"Because she doesn't like him, I suppose!"

"Because she has listened to that moon-struck Irishman of yours, until she is in a state when a lunatic asylum would be the fit place for her," his aunt exclaimed, losing her last vestige of self-control. "I found her this morning almost in his arms. He was calling her by her Christian name. He was—oh, I can't bear to think of it!"

"Do you mean she is going to marry Denis Bourke?" asked Maurice, now indeed interested,—astonished too.

"Not so bad as that, thank heaven!" cried Mrs. Conyngham. "She has promised me she will not."

"Then I don't perceive why you need be unhappy," replied Maurice, half gratified, half disappointed.

He would have thought it a great risk for Georgia to run,

but he would have admired her exceedingly had she determined to do so.

"Because, if she insists on staying here, she will end by going completely insane," said Mrs. Conyngham; and Maurice forbore to remind her that she had just declared such to be already the case. "If we can only persuade her to go! I have told her I must start to-morrow. Come too; say you will, Maurice, then she can have no excuse. Help me to get her away before that man comes back!"

"I don't wish to go myself at present," he answered.

"Oh, it was an evil hour when she heard of this place,—for her,—for you,—for all of us!" his aunt exclaimed.

"Gently!" returned Maurice, in a tone of repressed anger.

"I know you will be furious; but you will have to be convinced," Mrs. Conyngham hurried on. "The sooner Georgia is out of reach of Miss French's society the better."

"If you say one word more—one syllable—against the woman I have asked to be my wife, you and I part forever!" said Maurice, in a slow, deep voice, more impressive than any outburst of passion.

"Ask Miss French who the man was she went out to meet at midnight!" cried Mrs. Conyngham. "Ask—"

"Ah, we have got to catty's tracks at last!" broke in Maurice, contemptuously. "Denis Bourke and I were in the garden; Georgia too."

"Yes, I know that. But before you came there was another man there; he ran away when you appeared."

"That is a flight of the gentle Mayford's fancy," said Maurice, calmly; but, as he spoke, a recollection of the person secreted in Bourke's house flashed across his mind.

"Sibyl saw him. She had been frightened by voices. She got to the window, and saw Bourke."

"Ah, I told you so!"

"Wait! She saw Miss French crying and wringing her hands; Bourke tried to comfort her; then she went up to this man; they walked away together. Bourke left them alone for full twenty minutes."

There was a swift whirl of troubled thought in Maurice's brain; some secret had been kept from him,—a secret of Phillis's, but Georgia and Bourke knew it,—they must! Phillis's own words, Bourke's vague talk, always directed

against Maurice's hopes, as Maurice had believed, because his friend did not credit him with serious intentions, but which might apply to this secret,—all these things coursed through his mind. He could not wait; he must see Georgia,—see Phillis! He rose quickly.

"You and I will talk no more this morning, aunt," he said. "I don't blame you very much: your infatuation for your malicious friend blinds your judgment."

"You can't blame her this time, Maurice: it was her duty to tell me! No woman has a right to place herself in an equivocal position. Miss French must explain; any person in the world would say the same," cried Mrs. Conyngham.

"It is due to Miss French that Sibyl Mayford's coarse expressions should be refuted, and they shall be," returned Maurice, haughtily. "I depend on you to see that they go no further. I warn you. I shall hold you responsible if Mrs. Mayford repeats them."

"Let Miss French clear herself: nobody could be more glad than I," said Mrs. Conyngham, but her tone was too triumphant: it expressed plainly her conviction that the girl would not be able to set herself right.

"You insult her by the proposal," cried Maurice. "Miss French shall never hear of what has happened, if I can help it."

He caught up his hat, and turned to the door.

"Maurice, Maurice, you will persuade Georgia to go?" pleaded his aunt: "for her own sake—think, only think!"

"When Mrs. Mayford has to eat her vile words, there will be time enough to talk of that. Georgia shall not go while that wretch could say she went away because of this slander," returned Peyton.

"Maurice!" his aunt called again, but the door closed behind him without his paying any attention to her appeal.

Mrs. Conyngham knew that it would be useless to follow; he would not listen. She must hasten to Mrs. Mayford, and obtain her promise to say nothing to Mr. Caruthers at present. But by the time her troubled mind arrived at this thought, she had wasted precious moments in impotent despair over her helplessness to save the brother and sister from the consequences of their folly.

As she was about to leave her room, Mr. Caruthers knocked, saying, as he entered,—

"Rosalie says you wish to see me. I have just left Mrs. Mayford."

Mrs. Conyngham knew that he had already heard the tale.

"Oh, don't let Maurice find out that you know; he would never forgive me!" she cried, incoherently.

"I am not likely to tell any one," he answered. "But we must be just: for once Mrs. Mayford has done right. As she says, there can be no doubt that Miss French is deceiving your niece and urging her generous nature on to something she may bitterly regret."

Mrs. Conyngham could not forbear bursting into reproaches at his folly in having hidden from her the true state of affairs between Georgia and himself.

"She asked me to leave the disclosure to her: I had no right to refuse," he said.

"Oh, one may carry delicate scruples too far," cried Aunt Conyngham, goaded into a recklessness of speech which startled him, it was so unlike her usual self.

"At least I am glad she has told you," he said, mildly.

"She would not have done it if she could have helped. I saw that Bourke bidding her good-by," rejoined Mrs. Conyngham, stopping short; she was revealing more than she intended.

"Has Mr. Bourke gone away?" Caruthers asked, his voice as quiet as ever, though his countenance showed that her words had cut him deeply.

"Yes; won't be back till to-morrow night," Mrs. Conyngham hurried on. "I want to get Georgia away before he comes; you must help me! Oh, I have quite lost my head! But she does not mean to marry him; she has told me that,—promised me."

Mr. Caruthers's eyes brightened with a ray of hope. He sat down opposite Mrs. Conyngham, and said,—

"We must try to talk calmly, and see our way, my dear friend."

"Oh, if you had only trusted me a fortnight ago!" cried she. "But it is useless to go back to that. Tell me just how you stand with that crazy girl. I could make nothing out of her account."

He did tell her,—told her that his trust was in time, in Georgia's own clear sense, when this transitory illusion should

have passed ; and Aunt Conyngham felt comforted, and seized eagerly upon his idea, going speedily far beyond him in her hopefulness.

Maurice rode off, beset by suspicious fancies, the more wearing because too vague to find any basis on which they could either settle or be disputed. There was a mystery,—he could not avoid that conclusion,—but Bourke shared it with Phillis and Georgia also. He knew that his sister must have wanted the money for her friend. This explained the matter of her cashing the check.

Did Phillis require it for this man hidden in Bourke's house? Time and again, Denis had told him she had not a debt: whence could have come such sudden need for a sum so large, considering her means for its repayment, unless to give this stranger? Who could he be? Her father was dead; she had not a relative in the world, except her grandmother. Oh, in that past life, of which he knew so little, in those girlish days of affluence, of a wider experience than her present, had there been some secret which now thrust itself importunately forward? No, no; he would not think it. But Bourke's grave warnings—puzzling words Phillis had several times spoken lately, when he succeeded in forcing her to talk seriously—all came back and assumed a new and startling significance.

But his thoughts seemed an outrage to the woman he loved; he was furious with himself,—ashamed. He had meant to go to the Nest; but he would return home and wait till he got quiet. To question Phillis would be an unpardonable insult: still, he must tell Georgia that Sibyl Mayford had overheard the stranger's voice; of course it was merely that Phillis was interested in this *protégé* of Bourke's,—only that! Denis ought to have trusted him,—Phillis too. But he refused to dwell upon his lack of confidence, overwhelmed by remorse at his own unworthiness, as proved by the fact that Sibyl Mayford's revelations could disturb him for an instant.

When he reached the post-office he turned into a road which led to Bourke's house without passing the Nest. He would punish himself for his thoughts of the last half-hour, he had erred enough. Phillis was doubtless already angry with him for his hasty words of the previous night. She had reason to be; he was a wretch, almost as vile as Sibyl Mayford herself!

But at heart he had not suspected—never could doubt her,—his one love, his darling, his life. And he should yet win her. He was not half worthy, but he would try to become so. He put his doubts resolutely by; he dwelt on his affection; he recalled her looks, her talk, filling his mind with images of her as she appeared in her varying moods, now gay, now wistful and dreamy,—always bewitching, always his treasure, his pearl of women!

He reached the lane leading to the stables: he would ride in there. Joe Grimshaw was sure to be about them at that hour, and he could save the boy the trouble of coming to the house. He felt eager to oblige any and everybody, to be gentle and kind to the whole world, and the very revulsion of feeling sent his spirits up to fever-heat. As he expected, he saw Joe standing in the barn-door, and was so good-natured that the boy decided he grew pleasanter every day.

"Hanged ef he ain't a man a chap 'ud go into the fire fur," thought Joe, as he watched him walk away. "You might hunt a week o' Sundays and not find his match, unless you happened to run agin Mr. Bourke. They go in a team mighty even, and no mistake."

Maurice could see Mistress Tabitha busy in her kitchen as he passed; in the veranda at the back of the house old Patrick was sitting, but he had been up late the night before, and had fallen asleep in his chair. Maurice trod on tiptoe in order not to wake him, entered the hall, and was going up to his room, when it occurred to him that he would first smoke a tranquil pipe in the little room off the parlor.

He opened the door; the curtains were drawn, and amid the shadows he saw Phillis French seated in an arm-chair. At her feet knelt a man with his face turned so as to be visible to Peyton,—a face strange to him, but which in that terrible moment of watching seemed to burn its likeness indelibly upon his brain. A man who in the uncertain light looked young, handsome, even elegant, but with the undefinable air of a creature at war with society, who had violated its most stringent laws, and was ready to do so again; who, if an amnesty had been granted, and an opportunity given to live at peace with his kind, could no more have kept the truce than a leopard could refrain from rending his prey.

So deeply absorbed were both, that the opening of the door

did not rouse them. When Maurice recovered tangible thought after the instant which widened so illimitably that it held agony enough to have filled a whole life, he was about to step back and retire unperceived, but the mortal anguish which seemed rending body and soul asunder wrung from his lips a low groan.

The man started to his feet, Phillis French to hers; her glance was directed towards the door now, and she perceived Maurice. She moved forward like a person walking in sleep, one hand extended, her eyes staring straight before her, yet appearing to see nothing.

Mechanically Maurice retreated into the parlor; mechanically she followed. His hand released its hold upon the door so suddenly that it swung to as Phillis passed, and closed with a noise which sounded like thunder in the ears of both.

She must tell the whole now,—the whole terrible story of disgrace. How could she for a second have dreamed there was a possibility of his not shrinking away from her afterwards! And yet she knew that she had so dreamed from the day he had spoken out his love in the presence of others; she had not realized that she was so dreaming, but she knew it at this crisis, which held the necessity for revelation, and she knew that her dream had been a mad impossibility.

She must tell; she could trust to his honor to keep silence; but, once the confession uttered, they could not be more widely separated, during all time to come, if death and the grave had suddenly swept between.

Before she could articulate a syllable, he spoke:

"You warned me that your life held a secret. Now I know what it was,—what it is!"

"You know!" she echoed.

He had pronounced her sentence in those words; she read that in his face,—realized, too, that her heart was breaking.

"You might have sent me away! you might have spared me this!" he groaned.

"I couldn't spare myself," she muttered, but so low that he did not catch the sense. He only saw her lips move, then shut firmly together. She was so stony, so rigid, that in his horrible misery and insane wrath it seemed as if she were defying him,—so callous that neither his despair nor his contempt could move her.

"Your secret is safe with me. I need hardly tell you that," he said.

"Then for so much let me thank you," she answered, slowly, lifting her hand in a gesture of dismissal. A black cloud wavered before her eyes, through which she saw him dimly. She was near fainting, for the first time in her life: he must not witness this sign of her suffering. He had cast her off; she should die or go mad with shame later, if by any weakness she confessed her love and betrayed her breaking heart.

"Oh, I'll go!" he cried. "Don't be afraid of a scene. I recognize that I have no rights: they belong to him." And he pointed towards the adjoining room, face and gesture so full of scorn that her dull brain comprehended he did not know the truth! She believed he had in his rage snatched at an interpretation of the scene injurious, insulting to herself, forgetting that her manner, her words, forced such conviction upon him. The faintness passed; every nerve seemed to turn to steel in its tension.

"Yes, they belong to him!" she repeated.

"May God forgive you!" he said. "I think I never can!"

"Don't you ever dare!" she cried, gazing straight into his face, with eyes more fiery than his own.

"And you let me love you! you let me hope!"

"You love? You don't know the meaning of the word," she answered. "I warned you long since that I meant to give you a lesson. You have had it! now go!"

Her pitiless bravado, her hardened triumph,—so they seemed to him,—heightened his wrath till it momentarily overpowered his pain, leaving him outwardly cold and calm, but no more capable of knowing what he said than if he had gone actually insane.

"You can do one thing—"

"And now he means to ask a favor from *me*," she broke in.

"An act of justice,—of right feeling,—if you are capable of either," he retorted.

"I am not!" she exclaimed. "I am not!"

"Why, what woman are you?" he cried. "Revenge yourself on me because I loved you, if you will; but don't punish Georgia: she deserves something at your hands."

"Oh, I understand. You want her to leave my house? I

am not fit company for her? She shall not sleep another night under my roof, be sure of that. I'll tell her!"

"Ah, don't tell her anything. Leave her her illusion. Let the story, whatever it was, with which you have satisfied her and Denis, be her belief still. She would suffer so; she has a heart; she loves you. Why, she'd have died sooner than ask me—"

He stopped; crazed as he was, he knew that some words about the money had been on his lips; he could not stoop to speak of that. But he had said enough: she understood.

"She lent me eighteen hundred dollars; she got it from you! O my God! she dared to help me with money that came from you!"

"I know nothing about such matters—"

"Oh, the gallant falsehood!" she interrupted. "It is too late to make any attempt at being chivalrous! She got the money from you! Oh, I thought I could bear anything, but this is too much! Do you wait here!"

She ran out of the room: he heard her go up-stairs. He could not stop to think what her errand might be. He was fighting against a score of devils that were tugging at him, trying to push him forward in search of that man, to kill him before her eyes! She returned just as he was about to yield to the influence impelling him on. Before she could speak, he cried,—

"Do you love him?"

"Yes," she answered.

His arms dropped to his side; a glaze came over the fire in his eyes.

"That's all," he muttered. "Good-by—forever!"

"First take your money!" she exclaimed, and flung the roll of bank-notes at his feet.

He was gone, the door shut. She tried to call, to pick up the roll and follow him, but her limbs gave way. She tottered back and forth, then sank slowly to the floor,—not fainting; even the temporary relief of insensibility was denied,—but for many moments she lay there incapable of movement, as if smitten by paralysis, which left only her soul active, keen, staring out at its own misery.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

GRANDMA still slept. Georgia stole into her room several times to make sure that she had not wakened, then resumed her dreary march up and down the veranda, which she had been pacing during these long two hours of solitude.

Her own troubles and uncertainties only made a dull, aching undercurrent in her thoughts; her mind was too thoroughly absorbed in Phillis's strait to have room for any other active reflection. She was so fretted by the girl's long absence that she would have gone in search of her, had she not felt certain Maurice would come by the Nest on his return, and she must detain him until there would be no danger of his finding Phillis at Bourke's house.

He must be told the dismal story, but not yet,—not until Denis Bourke's guest was far away, and Phillis at least left far from this outward anxiety, which had so suddenly thrust itself forward from the gloom of the past. She heard the sound of wheels, looked out, and saw Mr. Caruthers driving up to the gate in an open pony-carriage. There was no groom with him. He descended, fastened the horse to a post, and entered the grounds.

His appearance gave Georgia a sensation of relief: he would be gentle and kind, and his companionship would afford her a temporary comfort and rest. She walked down the path to meet him, saying, as she got near,—

"I was all alone, and so tired of my own society! It is very good of you to come. Grandma Davis is not well, and Miss French is occupied."

He took her hand, looking at her with a cordial smile: inwardly he was a good deal agitated, for he realized that unless Georgia could be persuaded to go away at once, utter ruin might befall the fresh fabric of hope which he had so laboriously erected; but there was no sign of disquiet in face or voice as he said,—

"You do not look very well yourself. I am glad I happened on the right moment for coming."

"Oh, I am quite well,—only tired, though I have done nothing," she answered.

"Sometimes that is the most fatiguing business possible," he said. "Your aunt told me that Mrs. Davis was indisposed. Nothing serious, I trust?"

"Oh, no; she made a little too much exertion yesterday," Georgia explained. "So you have seen my aunt?"

"Yes," he replied. "Indeed, my visit is partly made at her request."

"Oh, she wants me to go away to-morrow," cried Georgia, "but I cannot. It would be unkind to leave Phillis so suddenly,—just now, too!"

"Just now?" he repeated, inquiringly. He did not mean to betray the fact that he had heard from Mrs. Mayford of a stranger's interview with Phillis on the previous night, but he wanted, if possible, to discover by what story she had satisfied Georgia. He tried to be just; but, with his preconceived dislike and distrust of Phillis, he could not help putting almost as severe a construction upon her conduct as did the widow herself. "Why just now?"

"When grandma is not well," Georgia said, quickly. "You know how kind they have both been to me: it would seem very ungrateful on my part to leave them at such a time."

"But since her indisposition is not serious!"

"Oh, at her age one never can tell!" cried Georgia. "No, no, Mr. Caruthers; don't let my aunt tease me: surely she can wait a few days longer!"

"The business which calls her back is—is very important," he said.

"Then she must leave me behind," returned Miss Grosvenor.

"Do you think it wise on your part to be left?" he asked, gently, but the eyes which regarded her were very grave.

Georgia knew that her aunt had given him some hint of the scene with Denis Bourke which her arrival had interrupted. She felt herself color under his penetrating glance, but answered, steadily and truthfully,—

"Indeed, I am not thinking about myself at all,—only of Phillis and grandma!"

"But if Mrs. Davis is quite well again by evening—"

"Indeed, indeed I cannot go to-morrow, Mr. Caruthers,"

she interrupted. Then she reflected that he must unavoidably suppose her influenced by some personal reason,—perhaps where Denis was concerned! She must remove this impression. Yet even to him she could not intrust the secret that her determination rose from the impossibility of leaving Phillis alone at this juncture. She could not go until that man got safely off, and Bourke had said that a delay of several days might be necessary. “I assure you, if I consulted my own wishes, I should go gladly,” she continued. “I was very much disappointed when Mrs. Mayford’s accident prevented my starting at the time we had set. I want to go, believe me. I will do so the moment it is possible.”

After all, she had spoken too eagerly, said too much: she saw this by the expression of his face as she looked up at him again.

“I am placed in a difficult position,” he replied, slowly; “yet I should be unfaithful to the friendship you have accepted if I did not say what I think. Am I going too far?—must you tell me that there are things even the truest and most devoted friend ought not to say?”

“No; whatever it may be,” returned Georgia, firmly, as the blush died out of her face and left her somewhat pale. “I told you that I considered you the truest, the dearest male friend I have in the world. I should be false to my word, and unworthy of your friendship, if I could not listen patiently and gratefully to anything you may think right to tell me.”

“This is noble and generous! Ah, you understand what friendship really means,” he said, with a sad smile.

“Don’t call me generous! it makes me ashamed!” she cried, with her usual impulsiveness. “Now tell me what is in your mind. No; I am restless, and would rather walk up and down the path,” she added, as he invited her by a gesture to sit down on a bench near.

“As you like,” he said, with one of his ceremonious bows. He did not offer her his arm, but they strolled along side by side under the maple-trees that burned brightly still with their splendor of autumn coloring. He did not hesitate; he spoke slowly, but only as if anxious to weigh each word before it was uttered. “To another woman, I might have to begin by excuses,—explanations; she might think me influenced by

selfish motives under a show of care for your peace ; but you will not."

"I shall not," Georgia answered.

She knew that he was going to speak of Denis Bourke,—to point out more plainly than he had ever done the risk she ran by any dalliance with her dream,—the life-long regret and remorse she would lay up for herself if she were guilty of any weakness, and she felt that his counsels would aid her at this exigency. Aunt Conyngham's openly worldly advice would only have irritated her ; but Mr. Caruthers's arguments would cover the ground on which she wished to place herself,—would come like an actual and visible exterior support at this juncture, when she so much needed such aid.

"The greatest kindness you can show is to go away ; if possible, to go away without seeing our brave, dear friend again. Your aunt gave me to understand that she saw and heard on his part what proved he was openly pleading his own cause. Whether she did right or wrong in letting me discover this, we need not discuss. Georgia, dear, honored lady, do not trust your heart beyond its strength. Your will has never consented to any affection on your side ; you must let it guide you ; else, in a moment of pardonable weakness, you may be led to wreck your life and his,—his ! If you could contemplate the sacrifice of your own future, you cannot wrong him."

Ah, that was what she wanted to be reminded of. He had chosen the very ground on which she must stand. The language did not even sound ponderous as he uttered it, because face and voice were eloquent with feeling.

"If there were hope for his future, I would be the first to bid you wait, if you could once convince yourself that your dream might, if permitted, ripen into a sentiment so strong, that it would enable you to bear the sacrifice of passing the best years of your life in obscurity,—which would be actual privation to your tastes and habits. But there is no hope. I admire and respect Denis Bourke with all my soul, but I know, and you know, that his beautiful aspirations are impossible of fulfilment."

Unconsciously, and in the energy of his speech, he had paused under the maples, which whispered softly in the breeze ; unconsciously she paused too. He looked anxiously at her.

"I want to hear," she said, in a low voice.

The arguments were not new ; she had gone over them again and again, but they acquired new force, thus spoken aloud by one whom she could trust, in whose judgment she had confidence.

"Run no risk," he continued, as they walked on ; "I mean for him. Go away, Georgia, go away at once, and leave behind a response so definite that he will know it would be useless to follow you."

"I will ! I will !" she said. "If I could leave before he comes back, I would ; but I must stay. There is a reason—I can't tell it to you : it has nothing to do with him. I mustn't say any more ! Persuade my aunt to wait, and do you wait too, good, kind friend. You can quiet my aunt : just a day or two."

They heard the sound of a horse's hoofs dashing furiously round a curve in the road.

"It is Maurice," said Mr. Caruthers. "Good heavens ! what a break-neck pace he rides at !"

Peyton checked his horse at the gate, tied him, and hurried in. Georgia and Mr. Caruthers went to meet him. The instant they saw his face clearly, a simultaneous dread smote them : a week's severe illness could not have changed it more than this last half-hour had done.

"Maurice, Maurice, what is the matter ?" Georgia cried.

"Matter ? nothing !" he exclaimed, hoarsely, with a dreadful laugh. "I'm going away : that's all."

"Where ? what for ?" asked Georgia, eagerly. Maurice's blind eyes perceived her companion.

"Halloo, Caruthers !" he said. "Tell the aunt she will see me in town,—to-morrow night, maybe. I say, Georgia, you'd better go with her ; you must, in fact."

"Not to-morrow," cried Georgia. "Have you seen Phillis ?"

"Yes, I've seen her !" he exclaimed, furiously,—controlled himself, glanced at Caruthers, laughed again that awful laugh. "I say, I beg both your pardons ; I'm not tipsy, just a little off my head with hurry."

"If you are leaving, you will be glad to see your sister alone for a few moments," said Mr. Caruthers. "Good-by ; we shall meet in town. Miss Grosvenor, shall I tell your aunt you will go to-morrow ?"

"Yes, yes! The sooner the better!" cried Maurice.

"Not to-morrow," pleaded Georgia, sick and faint with dread, as she studied her brother's countenance.

"I say yes!" he exclaimed, imperiously.

"Tell my aunt I will see her or write to her to-night, Mr. Caruthers," said Georgia. Her eyes besought him to go; he knew it was the kindest thing he could do. He bowed, went quickly down the path, got into the carriage, and drove off, certain that Maurice had discovered some secret of Phillis French's, and that the discovery had parted him from her irrevocably.

"In heaven's name, Maurice, what has happened?" groaned Georgia. "What have you said to Phillis?"

"What has she said to me, you mean!" he cried. "Here, talking is of no use. I'm going! I want a good gallop to clear my head. Perhaps I shall ride to some town and wait for the train."

"You can't go like this! you sha'n't!" pleaded Georgia, in agony. "Did Phillis tell you—"

"Let me alone!" he interrupted. "Can't you see I'm down in hell? Don't drive me quite mad! O my God! I'm a brute to speak to you like this! I didn't mean it!" he cried, pressing his burning lips to her cheek. "There! let me go; you know the gallop is the only thing for me."

"But you will come back?"

"Come back! Not if the rest of the earth were to fall in pieces!"

"But I can't let you go! I shall die of anxiety. And your things and—"

"I'll telegraph: don't be worried. I shall be all right after a ride."

She clung to him in her terrified pain; but he pushed her gently away.

"Let me go," he said. "It is the only way to show me kindness. I must be alone for a while. Good-by, dear, good-by!"

He kissed her again, rushed off, mounted his horse, waved his hand to her, and rode away at a tolerably moderate pace, able to think connectedly enough to remember that he was alarming her cruelly. Georgia returned to the house: Phillis had not come. She was just starting in search of her,

when grandma woke and rang the hand-bell that had been placed within her reach, and Georgia had to control her fright and pain and go to her.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

LONG before Phillis's paralysis-like weakness would permit her to rise, her mind had seized upon a plan of action. The money!—she must have the money! Disgrace, death—anything, rather than touch the sum which had reached her through Maurice Peyton's bounty!

She must get to Wachuset. It was still early in the afternoon. She knew what to do! Oh, should she never be able to stir?—would her will never conquer that sluggish, benumbed body?

She managed at last to get upon her knees, and saw the roll of bank-notes lying on the floor near her. The sight roused a kind of frenzied strength. She seized the packet, shuddering as if she had grasped some noxious reptile, thrust it into the pocket of her gown, and struggled to her feet. A strange lustre flashed into her eyes, a hectic color dyed her cheeks. She went into the next room: it was empty. She caught up her hat and shawl, which lay upon a chair, put them on, and went out into the hall. She was trembling still, shivering with cold.

"This won't do," she muttered; "this won't do."

She entered the dining-room, opened the sideboard and took out a decanter of sherry, drank a glass, ate some biscuits, hurried past old Patrick still sleeping in the porch, and walked quickly down the lane to the stables. She was strong enough now; her face wore an expression of such indomitable resolve that it looked hard, as if cut from stone.

"Joe—Joe Grimshaw!" she called.

Out came Joe. He had been to the house, and only came back in time to find that Mr. Peyton had saddled a fresh horse, and was mounting. He rode away without a word, leaving Joe in a state of bewilderment at such inexplicable conduct.

"What's wanted, Miss Phillis?" he asked.

"I must go to Wachuset; I can't wait to go home and have the pony harnessed. Put Whitefoot to the buggy. I'll drive him; you know Mr. Bourke often lets me."

"Oh, land's sake! it's all right enough; if you want the hoss you kin have him," said Joe. "Did you see Mr. Peyton? It's the queerest thing. He rode up a while ago as chipper as you please, and started to the house; 'n I went fur a bucket, and when I got back he was a-ridin' off agin lick-it-a-split!"

"Oh, hurry, Joe! I must get to Wachuset by four o'clock!" cried Phillis, paying no attention to his words.

Joe gave her one inquiring glance, then rushed off to do her bidding, using such despatch that the horse and wagon were soon ready.

"Hadn't I better go with you?" he asked.

She shook her head, got into the carriage, and drove down the lane, leaving Joe lost in wonder as to what had come to both her and Mr. Peyton.

"Mabby it's a row," thought Joe, at length; "folks as is sweet on each other does have 'em. But my eye, if Miss Phillis and Peyton get up one, won't it be a peeler, jist?"

As Phillis turned into the high-road, Mr. Caruthers reached the entrance to Bourke's grounds, and saw her drive off in the direction of Wachuset. He had left some maps with Bourke, which he should want in case he went to town the next day, though he feared Mrs. Conyngham's plan of forcing Georgia to go would fail, even when aided by influence so powerful as that of her brother.

Maurice had made some discovery in regard to Phillis French,—some terrible and shocking discovery, too; nothing else could have roused him to a pitch of such insane fury. Mr. Caruthers, in spite of his magnanimity, was human; he could not help reflecting that he had never approved of the girl, and gave himself credit for his clear-sightedness.

He walked up the winding path to the house and knocked several times at the door, but without success. Old Patrick had wakened from his nap, so indignant at having slept in the daytime that he started forth to see what Joe Grimshaw was about, and give him a scolding, whatever it might be; for he felt in a belligerent mood, which must vent itself a little on somebody, and experience had taught him that it would not be safe to attack Mistress Tabitha in her own domain.

Mr. Caruthers, tired of performing a symphony with the knocker, tried the door ; finding it locked, he decided to go round to the back of the dwelling and seek admittance.

The kitchen was shut from view by two rows of weeping willows, extending to the top of the lane that led towards the stables. As Mr. Caruthers approached, he saw a man walking to and fro under the trees, and involuntarily paused and regarded him, certain this must be the stranger of whom Sibyl Mayford had spoken. His appearance accounted for Miss French's visit : she had been holding an interview with this mysterious guest of Denis Bourke's.

Mr. Caruthers could see the countenance distinctly ; it looked older than it had done by the dim light in which Maurice Peyton had seen it, but handsome enough to be noticeable, still more so from its expression : recklessness, resolution, craft, and daring, were all imprinted upon it. He moved slowly, with a wild-animal freedom and grace. Twice he stopped and pressed his hand against his breast, breathing fast and with an effort, evidently suffering from physical pain.

Mr. Caruthers possessed a wonderful memory for faces : he knew this one was familiar to him, though what his associations were therewith, he could not recall. He walked on ; at the sound of his footsteps the man turned quickly, and disappeared among the trees.

Mr. Caruthers found Tabitha in the kitchen ; he explained his errand, and she showed him into the smoking-room, where, as he expected, he discovered the maps upon a table. He took them and departed, Tabitha letting him out by the front door, a little uneasy from first to last, as he remarked with his lawyer's habit of observing trifles.

He drove on towards Wachuset. In the distance he could see Phillis French in her open buggy, urging Whitefoot forward at a rapid pace. He sought in vain to remember when and where he had before encountered that stranger ; yet he could have sworn it had happened during the pursuance of his professional duties,—could almost have sworn that the troubled eyes had gazed out at him from the criminal's dock.

However this might be, the man was secretly established in Bourke's dwelling and in some way connected with Phillis French. His coming had at least brought about one fortunate

result: Maurice had escaped from the dangerous girl's thralldom.

He entered the hotel intending to seek Mrs. Conyngham and give her an account of his conversation with Georgia, but a waiter handed him some letters in the hall, and he turned aside into the reading-room to examine his correspondence. The epistles contained nothing of importance, and while perusing them his mind was still occupied with conjectures in regard to Denis Bourke's visitor.

A pile of newspapers lay on the table, which he had found no leisure to read in the morning. He picked up a *New York Herald*, and glanced at the political news, the state of the money-market; then a letter from a New Orleans correspondent attracted his attention. It contained an account of a man called Henry Osborne, arrested some years previous in that city for bank-embezzlement. No doubt existed as to his guilt, but he had got off through some quibble of the law, aided too, most people believed, by money freely lavished in his favor.

The prosecutors, confident of his conviction, had neglected to prepare an indictment on a second charge, by which they might have held him, and the criminal disappeared. Now, after these years, he had been again seen in America; he had passed the intervening time in Australia, and fled to avoid the consequences of implication in a daring forgery. Telegrams from Melbourne stated that as yet the insufficiency of evidence put him beyond the reach of the extradition treaty, but the idea was, if he were caught, to hold him by the untried criminal charge, and give the Australian prosecutors an opportunity to complete the chain of proofs which would place him in their hands.

Henry Osborne! Mr. Caruthers knew now where he had before seen the man this day encountered. He had been in New Orleans at the time of the trial, and had on several occasions visited the court: the stranger secreted in Denis Bourke's house was this fugitive from justice.

He recollected something else, too: the money expended to prevent his conviction was said to have been provided by a girl, supposed to be either his wife or his mistress! Mr. Caruthers understood Phillis French's secret at last!

His first sensation was one of horror at the thought that

Georgia Grosvenor had been for months exposed to this woman's society, that Maurice had so narrowly escaped becoming her victim.

Before he could resolve upon any plan of action, a message came from Mrs. Conyngham: she desired to see him at once.

He went to her sitting-room, and found her in a state of great agitation.

"I saw you drive up," she said. "Why did you not come to me?"

"I stopped to read my letters," he began, but she could not wait for him to finish his sentence.

"Has Georgia consented?" she asked.

Mr. Caruthers shook his head.

"But she shall go!" Mrs. Conyngham exclaimed. "Phillis French is in the town; I saw her drive past. I sent her word I must see her, and she promised to stop on her way back."

This speech inspired Mr. Caruthers with a new idea. If he informed Miss French that he had recognized Henry Osborne, she might, in her eagerness for his departure, herself insist on Georgia's leaving her house. He had no intention of threatening the girl,—even at this pass he was incapable of employing such means,—but his horror at the thought of Miss Grosvenor's being longer exposed to the contamination of her society made him feel that his clear duty was to do everything possible to separate the pair without delay.

"What do you expect to gain by talking with her?" he asked.

"I shall tell her; but never mind. Have you seen Maurice?"

"Yes; he has gone away."

"Gone!" cried Mrs. Conyngham. "Then he has discovered something! Phillis French has betrayed herself!"

Mr. Caruthers repeated what had occurred, described Maurice's frantic excitement, and his words to Georgia.

"He has found the girl out!" cried Mrs. Conyngham. "And you say Georgia still refuses to go?"

"She did not consent. You may be sure Miss French has managed to enlist her sympathies, and Mr. Bourke's too, by some specious falsehood," Mr. Caruthers said.

"Maurice's going off leaves my way clear," said Mrs. Conyngham. "I shall try to make the girl herself decide Georgia to leave."

"Will you allow me to see her for a few moments before you have any conversation with her?" Mr. Caruthers asked, after a moment's reflection.

"Yes; but why?"

"I think I can assist you," was all he said: he had no mind to betray the discovery he had made.

"Very well; as you please," returned Mrs. Conyngham. "I know there is some dreadful secret in that woman's life: she deserves no mercy."

Mr. Caruthers fully coincided with this sentiment, though he did not express an opinion.

"I will go down-stairs and bring her up here when she comes," he said. "It is understood that you let me see her alone."

"Yes; I'll stop with Sibyl till you send for me."

After a few more words they parted. Mr. Caruthers descended, and Mrs. Conyngham sought her friend's apartment. The widow was in her sleeping-room, lying on the bed.

"Don't get up," Mrs. Conyngham said. "I'm only waiting till Mr. Caruthers has seen Phillis French: he has found out something—I don't know what. She will be here before long; he is to take her to my room, and I'll wait in your salon till he sends for me."

Mrs. Mayford asked a few questions, but she seemed very drowsy and tired, and she was sorry to have disturbed her. Mrs. Conyngham went softly into the adjoining chamber, and closed the door, to wait with what patience she might until summoned by Mr. Caruthers.

Sibyl Mayford waited for a while, then she got off her bed and hobbled to a closet which communicated with Mrs. Conyngham's salon; the door was locked, but a person stationed there could hear every word of any conversation going on in the parlor.

Mr. Caruthers was standing on the piazza when Phillis French drove up.

Her cheeks were scarlet, but, so far from looking troubled or cast down, there was a fire in her eyes, a triumphant expression on her face, whereat he secretly marvelled. It hardened him, too, still more against her, for it roused a fear that she had hit upon some plan which would extricate her from the difficulties into which Henry Osborne's appearance

had thrown her. She might hope even yet to deceive Maurice anew, might delude Georgia into helping her.

He stepped forward and assisted her to alight.

"How do you do, Mr. Caruthers?" she said. "You have your judicial look on to-day. I am sure you are dreaming of the time when you will be judge in the supreme court! Mrs. Conyngham has sent for me: her message was so urgent that I feared Mrs. Mayford might be worse."

"She is very comfortable indeed," he replied, stiffly.

"Delighted to hear it!" cried Phillis, noting his manner, and drawing her own inference therefrom. "So it was pure anxiety to see me that caused Mrs. Conyngham to send? so sweet of her! But I must not keep her waiting any longer. I'm afraid I am later than I promised, but I had a world of business on my hands."

"You look as if it had ended successfully," he said.

"I am always successful!" she exclaimed, with a feverish laugh, her eyes flashing brightly upon him.

He accompanied her up-stairs, opened the door of the salon, and ushered her in.

"Mrs. Conyngham must be in her bedroom," said Phillis. "Don't let me detain you, Mr. Caruthers. I can find her."

"She will be here presently," Mr. Caruthers replied. "I wish to speak with you, Miss French, before you see her."

Phillis turned and faced him: his countenance and voice were stern enough, but she met his gaze unflinchingly.

"I am listening, Mr. Caruthers," she said.

"I have something very painful to say," he continued, with a sudden sensation of pity rising, in spite of his harsh judgment.

"Then the more quickly and the more plainly you say it the better," she answered, still keenly regarding him.

The defiance in her eyes and voice subdued his half-formed sympathy. He drew the newspaper from his pocket, held it before her, and pointed to the paragraph which concerned Henry Osborne.

She grew very pale, but her gaze did not shrink under his.

"I perceive you have already seen the paragraph," he said, with his lawyer's quickness; "I need not trouble you to look at it."

He folded up the journal, steadily regarding her. He saw

one convulsive shudder shake her frame, then she stood motionless as a statue, a terrible dread dimming the fire in her eyes.

"Well?" she asked, hoarsely.

"Henry Osborne is in Mr. Bourke's house. I have seen him," Mr. Caruthers said; "at least I have suspicions so strong that I should have grounds for telegraphing to the chief of the Philadelphia police. This letter says a man has been sent on there from New Orleans, who knows Osborne well."

Phillis French slowly extended two pleading hands, and her eyes stared up at him full of agonized entreaty. Whatever her connection with the criminal might be, whatever dark or degrading secret her past might hold, she was a woman and he pitied her,—was bitterly sorry, too, that his opening words had been so blunt in their sternness.

"Do not for a moment think me capable of verifying my suspicions," he went on, hastily; "I do not want to know—I do not want to see him again; but it was right for me to warn you: some one else might recognize him, if he is the man I suppose him to be."

Across the misery in Phillis's face swept an expression of thankfulness and relief, but she stood silent. He felt inclined to leave her without another word, so great was his pity; but he knew that later he should have reason to reproach himself for such weakness: it was his duty to impress upon her the necessity of sending Miss Grosvenor away.

"There is one thing more," he said. "Understand, I have no intention of coercing your actions; so far as I am concerned you are perfectly free; but if you really care for your—" He paused; he could not bring himself to call Georgia her friend—"for the lady who has passed the summer in your house, there is a duty you owe to her."

"I understand," Phillis said, speaking with difficulty. She dropped into a chair and sat still for a moment to recover her strength: then she looked up at him again, and added; "I do not need to see Mrs. Conyngham: you can tell her that her niece will go."

"Excuse me; it would be better you should do so. Going away so abruptly might rouse a suspicion in Mrs. Conyngham's mind that I had told you something very serious."

"I will see her," Phillis said.

He bowed, and went out of the room. An instant after, Sibyl Mayford crept forth from the closet, and lay down again upon her bed.

Even in this moment of supreme agony, Phillis French's indomitable will enabled her to triumph over the physical weakness caused by pain and terror. A carafe and glass stood on the table within reach of her hand. She poured out a goblet of water, and drank it.

The door opened, and Phillis rose; Mrs. Conyngham, wearing her coldest and stateliest aspect, swept into the chamber.

"Good-morning, Miss French," she said. "I am much obliged to you for coming. Pray sit down."

"You must excuse me; I am in great haste to get home; my grandmother is not well," Phillis replied. "Will you tell me why you sent for me?"

She made no effort to behave as if she supposed the summons had any ordinary cause; she looked fixedly at her hostess, with a haughtiness which that lady considered insolence. Maurice had thrown the girl over; no necessity for pretence remained. Mrs. Conyngham was not usually an ungenerous woman; but so much suffering had come to her through this dangerous creature that she could not forgive her even now, when it appeared certain that Maurice had escaped from her wiles.

"Do you know that my nephew is gone?" she asked.

"I know that I told him to go," Phillis answered; "and I bade him never come back. Does that satisfy you, madam?"

Scarcely the manner in which Mrs. Conyngham had expected her words to be received; still, she found comfort in the assurance that everything was over between Maurice and this girl; though for Phillis to declare that she had given him his dismissal, was a fresh insolence and a falsehood; of course Maurice had gone because she could not satisfactorily account for the presence of the stranger in her garden at midnight!

"I suppose you did not send for me merely to ask this question? What other business have you with me, madam?" Phillis continued.

"I want you to insist on my niece's going," cried Mrs. Conyngham, flushing into anger. "Maurice wishes it too. I have no desire to intrude on your secrets, no desire to injure you in the opinion of the people you live among; but I can-

not permit my niece to remain in the house of a young woman who lays herself open to suspicion by going out at midnight to meet—”

“Ah!” interrupted Phillis, with a contemptuous smile, “Mrs. Mayford played the spy, did she? Pray give her my compliments on the return she made for my hospitality.”

“You could hardly have expected her to be silent, considering that my niece was under your roof. I know, of course, that either Georgia is ignorant of what happened, or that you have excited her sympathy by some specious explanation; but I warn you that it would not deceive me.”

“Do I look inclined to offer you any?” demanded Phillis. “Well, madam, what you mean is, that, unless your niece goes away to-morrow, you will try to injure my character by slanderous reports. Is that it?”

“I repeat, I have no wish to meddle with you or your secrets, Miss French,” returned Mrs. Conyngham, loftily; “but I shall do my duty, if you force me, and my conscience will acquit me of any such coarse intentions as those you name.”

“And you call yourself a Christian!” Phillis said, in a low, slow voice of intolerable scorn. “Madam, no threat could frighten me into begging Georgia to go. If I were to tell her what you have said, no power under heaven could induce her to stir.”

Mrs. Conyngham perceived that she had allowed anger to carry her too far. The creature was right: Georgia would not stir.

“Miss French!” she exclaimed.

“Your niece will leave my house to-morrow,” pursued Phillis, in the same slow, scornful voice; “not because of your threats, but because I wish to set myself free from you and all belonging to you. You have degraded yourself unnecessarily, and I know you well enough to be certain it will hereafter prove a terrible humiliation to recollect that you descended to a meanness worthy of your friend Mrs. Mayford, but out of keeping with your character. If I desired to punish you, I could not do it so effectually as this miserable memory will. And now I shall bid you good-by.”

She walked to the door, swept a low, graceful courtesy, and disappeared, leaving Mrs. Conyngham quite stunned between anger and a feeling more resembling shame than she liked to recognize.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

GEORGIA'S anxiety had grown overwhelming as the hours passed and Phillis did not return. Grandma, though disinclined to rise, was cheerful and in a mood to talk, and Georgia had to account for Phillis's absence, converse quietly, hide every sign of excitement, until it seemed to her that the restraint she was forced to put upon herself would drive her wild.

At last grandma fell asleep again, and Georgia hurried out of the room. The old-fashioned clock in the hall was just striking five.

"Georgia!" called Phillis.

Miss Grosvenor looked up, and saw her friend mounting the stairs. She followed, but Phillis never spoke or turned her head until they were in her chamber.

"In heaven's name, Phillis, where have you been?" cried Georgia. "How fearfully tired you look! What have you been doing?"

"Setting myself free," Phillis replied, with a strange smile. She opened her pocket-book, took out a bank-check, and placed it in Georgia's hands.

"The money!" exclaimed Miss Grosvenor. "You are paying me back the money!"

"Not you, but the person from whom you borrowed it," said Phillis.

"Oh, how did you find out?" groaned Georgia.

"Mr. Peyton told me. Wait,—don't speak,—let me do him justice: he did not mean to tell! He was so furious that he did not know what he said; he stopped himself; but I understood."

"Oh, you quarrelled! Phil, Phil, what has happened?"

"Of course I could not waste a moment in paying him. There is the check; see that it reaches him without delay," pursued Phillis, without heeding Georgia's agonized supplication.

"Phillis, Phillis, what mad thing have you done? How did you get the money?"

"I have sold the farm," said Phillis. "Mr. Travers has

always wanted it. He would advance nothing on a mortgage. I sold it, and this is the first of the purchase-money."

"Great heavens!—sold the farm!"

"I'd have sold my soul sooner than let the day pass without paying the money!" cried Phillis. "It seems you don't know me yet, Georgia. Be indebted to the man who condemned me,—who believes me a vile, lost woman,—I!"

Georgia sprang towards her, and pressed her hand over Phillis's mouth.

"Stop!" she said; "you are crazy: oh, so was he when he came! Try to explain quietly; did you tell him?"

"I had no need to tell anything," replied Phillis, as Georgia released her. "Mr. Peyton looked into the room where we were."

"You and—and Mr. Osborne?"

"Yes. Your brother saw him on his knees; he was promising, begging, trying to persuade me to give up the investments instead of paying the annuity. He could make a fortune if I would; he—oh, you can imagine!"

"And Maurice—"

"Went into the parlor. I followed. I don't know what he said, only his first words showed me what he thought; so then I went as mad as he, and then he dashed off. That's all I can tell you," said Phillis, sitting down in a chair, her brief excitement over.

"And Maurice has gone," sighed Georgia. "I don't know where. He has promised to telegraph."

"Then you will send him the money at once. Thank God, he has gone!" said Phillis. "And now listen to me, Georgia: I want to finish all this talk. You know I love you; I know you love me. Give me a proof of affection,—you can,—but only one."

"What, Phil?—what? Oh, you know I'd give my life! What do you want me to do?" demanded Georgia, breathlessly.

"I want you to go away to-morrow with your aunt."

"Oh, Phil, not that! I can't, I won't leave you!"

"You must," said Phillis, firmly. "You can do no good here; you may do great harm just by your presence. I must be entirely alone when Denis Bourke comes,—alone till everything is done. I cannot explain; I will not. Georgia, Georgia, if you love me, promise to go!"

"I can't, Phil! I can't!"

"Then I must turn you out, or go away and hide somewhere with—with *him*," said Phillis. "Your aunt won't go without you. Only think if they should discover! and they might! they might! I cannot be safe till I am here alone. Georgia, you must go to-morrow. Think if by staying you endangered me,—if somebody recognized him! You must go."

"I will! I will!" sobbed Miss Grosvenor, falling on her knees, and hiding her face in Phillis's lap.

"My good Georgia! my darling girl!" Phillis said, softly: "that is right; that is the one help you can give."

They clung to each other for a few seconds in silence. Phillis broke down, too, for a little, but soon recovered herself.

"We mustn't cry," she said. "Think of grandma. How is she?"

"Better; but she is in bed still. Oh, Phil, Phil, what will she do when she knows you have sold the farm?"

"I am to have it for a year. There is time enough: we need not think of that," replied Phillis. "Now, Georgia, write to your aunt and say you will go. If you don't, she will be coming over here; and we want the evening to ourselves."

"Oh, yes; nobody must come."

"Then write. Joe Grimshaw is here to take Whitefoot home: he can drive over with the note first."

Georgia dashed off a few lines, and Phillis called Cinders to carry the note down to Joe, whom she had found on her arrival, and had bidden wait, as she wanted to send him to the town.

"Cinders can pack your trunks," Phillis said. "Now, Georgia, we will go to grandma: she mustn't be agitated. We will have some tea, and put everything out of our heads for the present."

The old lady received the news of Georgia's departure with more composure than they expected: physical weakness perhaps dulled her faculties a little for the time.

Joe Grimshaw returned with a missive for Georgia from her aunt, full of rapturous delight and affection; but Georgia flung the billet aside without having patience to read it.

Grandma got up and had tea with them, and even sat in the parlor until beyond her usual hour, and, though she was somewhat weak and languid, there was nothing to make the girls anxious. They devoted the evening to her,—talked, sang, read aloud,—both glad to escape being left alone together, for their conversation would be sure to stray back to subjects which it could do no good to discuss, which could indeed only bring added pain.

When they at last saw grandma to her room and the care of Cinders, who always slept in the chamber adjoining the old lady's, Phillis said, resolutely,—

“Now, Georgia, we are going to bed at once,—to sleep also. We are both thoroughly worn out, and sleep we must have.”

So they separated, each promising the other to retire without delay, and keeping the promise,—Phillis even exceeding hers, for she fell asleep almost directly. Her physical health was so perfect that bodily fatigue asserted its supremacy, and even the suffering and the agonies of suspense did not enable her mind to combat.

Georgia was less successful: she lay awake for hours, and her thoughts wandered from Phillis and Maurice to her own troubles, and back again, in a dreary round.

She was going away. She should never see Denis Bourke again. The letter she meant to write him would prevent that. Going away! her idyl over; her dream ended; oh, it seemed the only real portion of her life; all the rest looked empty as a phantasmagoria; she had never really lived until these past months; but she must go.

Mr. Caruthers was right; she could not sacrifice this man who loved her; that would be a sin; and her marrying him would prove an added fetter, an intolerable load, when difficulties and disappointments came, as come they must, and he saw plainly that his beautiful aspirations were incapable of fulfilment.

She must go, but it was for his sake, not her own. She knew now that the fullest honors the world could give, the wealth of Golcondas, the power of kings, if offered her, could not weigh so much as a straw in the balance. She loved Denis with all her heart and soul: she went away to prove that love. She could not render his life a more dreadful sacrifice

than the working out of his theories would necessarily render it: if she could have been aught else than a drag, she would have stayed: she could not,—she must go!

She slept at length, and in the early dawn was awakened by the touch of soft arms about her neck, warm lips pressed to hers. She opened her eyes, and, in the dim, gray light saw Phillis.

"I had to come," she said; "I woke up from such a dreadful dream! I wanted to be sure you were here!"

Georgia pulled her into bed, and drew the clothes about them. They huddled into each other's arms, uttering a few broken sentences, then both fell asleep, and did not wake till the sunbeams were dancing in bright fantastic figures across the floor.

The morning passed. Ann Raines appeared, and, when she heard the news of Miss Grosvenor's departure, lifted up her voice and wept as loudly as Isaac: even lavish gifts, from articles of personal decoration up to money, failed to console her. Old Patrick appeared, and Tabitha too, who did not leave the house once in six months; and as for Joe Grimshaw, he did nothing but invent excuses for numerous visits, wearing a visage of distress that would have befitted the chief mute at a funeral.

Grandma still kept to her bed,—not ill, only weak; and it was a relief to the girls to leave her a good deal to Ann Raines's care, for if she had been up, and able to watch, her quick intuitions might have discovered that troubles beyond the pain of parting affected both.

The two managed to find constant occupation; they decided that Georgia had forgotten to lay out some books for packing, went to the bottom of a great box before the volumes were discovered, and then had to repack. Now and then a moment of weakness would overtake them, but was quickly subdued, each earnest in self-control for the other's sake.

"What shall I do without you?" Georgia would cry, catching Phillis in her arms. "You will write—every few days?—tell me everything?"

"Everything," said Phillis, still the stronger, though before noon she had again visited Bourke's house, Georgia waiting for her by the lake; had seen Henry Osborne and quieted

his impatience; had aided him too in his physical suffering, which had steadily increased during the night, in spite of every remedy that his experience of such paroxysms could suggest.

Then, again, Georgia cried out in her misery,—

“That old life I am going back to,—that I hate so! Oh, Phil, Phil, what will become of me?”

“You will marry Mr. Caruthers,” Phillis answered, slowly.

“Fate will be too strong for you: it is for all of us.”

“Never!” exclaimed Georgia. “I will never do it! Some-time you will tell Denis why I went,—years hence.”

“Yes,” said Phillis, “when the right time comes.”

There was no secret between them now. Phillis understood that for Bourke’s own sake—his alone—Georgia meant never to see him again, and Georgia knew that, all her life long, Phillis must remember the brightness of her personal dream. Afternoon came; the train would leave at four o’clock.

Aunt Conyngham sent a note warning Georgia to be punctual. Georgia replied that she was ready. Mrs. Conyngham feared to present herself, so she wrote. She would have liked to make Mr. Caruthers her messenger, in order to learn what was going on at the Nest, and gain some idea of Georgia’s state of mind, whereby to regulate her own conduct when they met; but Mr. Caruthers wisely declined to comply with her request: his intuitions were too delicately keen for him to venture to thrust his presence upon the girl during those last hours.

A telegram reached Miss Grosvenor from her brother, dated at a place called Warfield. He desired her to send Joe Grimshaw on, to bring his luggage and ride the horse back, but Joe had gone to attend to some matter Bourke had left in his hands; however, Patrick promised that the boy should start in the evening. Mrs. Conyngham’s note had said they should stop at Warfield for the night, in order to let Mrs. Mayford rest.

“I shall see Maurice,” observed Georgia, as she put the despatch in Phillis’s hands. “He will ask—oh, what shall I say?”

“Nothing, except that he must go on,” replied Phillis. “It is not likely he would come back. I should—oh, I should die if he did.”

Georgia had said good-by to grandma ; her trunks were in the cart : she and Phillis meant to walk to the station.

The servants, after returning again and again to say farewell, had departed, and Ann Raines had retired to have "a good cry," under pretence of attending to Mrs. Davis.

It was time to set out. The two girls lingered, looking furtively in each other's faces, talking about any trifle that presented itself.

"It doesn't seem possible yet that I can be going, Phil," said Georgia, suddenly.

"I was just ready to say it," Phillis answered.

"We must start," said Georgia. "Good gracious ! Mr. Sykes hasn't taken the boxes ! What does he mean ?"

"He has gone into the kitchen for a rope. He will get down as soon as we," said Phillis. "We must go, Georgia."

"Yes, we must go," echoed Georgia.

Yet they both hesitated. They gazed again in each other's eyes, then made a step forward at the same instant. Then a carriage rattled up the hill, and a lady seated therein waved her parasol gayly, as the vehicle stopped at the gate.

"Your aunt !" Phillis exclaimed.

"We shall walk all the same : there is plenty of time. She has come to bid you good-by," returned Georgia.

In her excited state Phillis had much ado not to laugh hysterically at the idea of the lady's coming with that amiable intention,—she knew that Mrs. Conyngham could not feel safe until she secured her niece,—but she only said,—

"How very kind !"

"We will go and meet her," said Georgia.

"By all means," responded Phillis.

They walked down the path ; but, before they reached the gate, Mrs. Conyngham had alighted from the carriage, and was hurrying towards them.

"I thought I would come for you, Georgia," she called. "We deposited Mrs. Mayford in the waiting-room, and Mr. Caruthers is struggling to get our arks checked."

By this time the three met ; Aunt Conyngham kissed her niece on both cheeks, and grasped Phillis's hand with great cordiality ; she was positively radiant.

"You need not have taken the trouble ; there is plenty of time ; we want to walk," said Georgia, ungratefully.

"Dear Miss French, I am so sorry to say good-by!" cried Aunt Conyngham, disregarding her niece's remark. "It is always so sad a ceremony:—ah, this is a world of partings!"

"Oh, yes!" said Phillis, with her most careless air and smile.

"I'm afraid there is not time for me to go in and say good-by to your dear grandmother," observed Mrs. Conyngham, glancing at her watch.

Phillis stood where she could look down on the road which led to the station. She saw Denis Bourke hastening up the hill: he had just arrived by the afternoon train.

Denis must be allowed to say farewell to Georgia. She would not stop now: there was no danger. But Phillis did not believe this separation between him and Georgia was to be lasting; anyway, she owed to Denis the right of a few parting words.

"Plenty of time, Mrs. Conyngham," she said. "Grandma will be so glad to see you; please come. Wait here, Georgia."

She hurried Mrs. Conyngham up the path. Georgia sat down on a bench to wait. Just as the pair disappeared into the house, the sharp click of the opening gate caused Miss Grosvenor to turn her head; she saw Denis Bourke coming towards her.

"I am back, you see,—earlier than I expected," he cried, waving his hat in the air.

"He had come. Oh, the parting! If she could only have been spared this," was Georgia's thought. He had got near enough to notice her travelling-dress. He perceived the trunks. He moved forward, stern and white.

"Going!" he exclaimed. "You are not going?"

"Yes," returned Georgia, trying to smile, and lifting her agonized eyes to his. "I told you we might start any day. My aunt has business in town—"

The sentence died unfinished. He had seized her two hands in that masterful grasp which always seemed to overpower her will.

"Not like this?" he cried. "You can't go like this!"

"I must!" she said; "I must!"

"But you love me, Georgia?—you love me? Say that—only say that—"

"Don't!" she interrupted. "I can say nothing. I will write to you."

"I shall follow," he answered, firmly.

"You must not! indeed you must not!" she pleaded. "Mr. Bourke, it is all over. Try to forget me: we ought not to meet again!"

"Ought we to break our hearts,—yours as well as mine?" he cried. "You love me!—you have owned it."

"Georgia!" called Mrs. Conyngham.

She had come out of the house, had caught sight of Bourke, and hurried forward, Phillis following.

Bourke did not release Georgia's hands.

"Let me speak to you alone," he said, aloud. "Come into the garden a moment. Come."

"Georgia, we shall be late!—we must go!" cried Mrs. Conyngham. "If Mr. Bourke will kindly end his theatricals, it will be a favor."

Bourke still held Georgia's hands fast, as he turned towards her aunt.

"Madam, your niece loves me!" he exclaimed. "I have a right to speak! Georgia, Georgia, don't go until you have owned the truth! If you do, fate will be too strong for you: you will marry a man whom you do not care for, and be wretched."

"Less so, I should fancy, than spending her days in Mr. Bourke's old farm-house!" cried Mrs. Conyngham, nearly out of her senses with anger and fright.

"Hush, aunt!" Georgia said, half in anger, half in entreaty.

"Georgia," pleaded Bourke, "let your heart speak! let it save you,—save me! Put by that fear of injuring my life. If you take my hope away, you take half my energy and strength! Georgia, life shall not be hard for you. You know you can trust my word. I would not promise if I could not fulfil it!"

"Oh, we must go!" exclaimed Aunt Conyngham. "Georgia will write to you, Mr. Bourke. Let her go!"

"Speak, Georgia!" he urged. Just then the gate opened: he saw Mr. Caruthers. "Remember, you don't realize it, but you are deciding now! If you go, the world conquers, heart and soul perish. Georgia! Georgia!"

"I must go!" she moaned. "Oh, don't think me utterly heartless! I should not be afraid for myself; oh, believe that!"

"Georgia!" he cried, in ecstasy.

"Georgia!" groaned Mrs. Conyngham.

"You can't leave Phillis just now," he pleaded.

"Miss French!" exclaimed Aunt Conyngham, turning to Phillis with a fairly menacing gesture.

"It is better for her to go," murmured Phillis.

"Oh, now I understand!" said Denis. "Georgia, don't you see? Mrs. Conyngham has been threatening her!"

"Sir, how dare you?" cried that lady.

Georgia, absorbed in her misery, did not even hear. Mr. Caruthers was close to them, deathly pale, but calm.

"It is time to start," he said. "Is Miss Grosvenor ready?"

Georgia bowed her head, tried to rise. Bourke held her hands still.

"Don't you hear, Georgia?" he called. "Phillis wants you: your aunt has threatened her,—told her she will repeat—"

"Did you?" Georgia interrupted, turning her agonized eyes upon her aunt.

Aunt Conyngham strove to deny: her face made confession, though.

"Speak, Phillis; tell the truth!" cried Bourke. "She can't hurt you or anybody; speak!"

"Miss French knows that her friend ought to go," Mr. Caruthers exclaimed, carried beyond prudence by his fears.

"What!" retorted Denis. "You have not helped this woman to torment a helpless girl? I'll not believe that!"

"No, no!" rejoined Phillis; "Mr. Caruthers was very kind; but—"

"Mrs. Conyngham threatened you.—You hear, Georgia?"

"Aunt!" cried Georgia.

"You will not be insane enough to listen to such slanders, Georgia!" pleaded the agitated lady, wringing her hands.

"Did you threaten?" demanded Georgia. "Ah, you did! you did!"

This certainty and Mr. Caruthers's words proved the crowning stroke.

"I can't go! I will not go!" she said. "Aunt, nothing shall induce me to leave Phillis at present."

"You mad girl!" Mrs. Conyngham fairly shrieked. "Oh, it will end in your marrying that miserable beggar!"

Georgia bowed her head: a light broke over the pallor of her face, and illuminated her eyes.

"If I am ever worthy," she said.

Bourke uttered an inarticulate cry of joy; Aunt Conyngham stood speechless; Mr. Caruthers stepped forward.

"Good-by, Miss French," he said; "good-by, Mr. Bourke." He took Georgia's hand, kissed it, and let it drop, saying only, "You are a brave, true woman. Whatever you finally decide, may God's blessing rest upon you!" He turned to Mrs. Conyngham. "We have not a moment to lose," he added.

The vanquished lady hesitated for an instant, then accepted his arm, burst into a passion of tears, and was moving on in silence.

"Aunt, aunt, not like this!" cried Georgia.

Mrs. Conyngham ceased weeping, and confronted her, hard and stern.

"When you come to your senses, when you give up these people, I will pardon you; until then, never!" she exclaimed.

Georgia did not answer; Mr. Caruthers led Mrs. Conyngham away. The carriage drove off: the three stood there alone.

CHAPTER XL.

MAURICE PEYTON's mad gallop did not end till he reached Warfield, a town some forty miles away.

It was late in the night when he arrived. He went to bed at once, and, soon after day broke, physical fatigue forced him into a slumber from which he did not wake until noon. He dressed and went out, sent his telegram to Georgia, and dragged through the rest of the day as best he could.

Life had suddenly become a torment,—the world a hell! How was he to bear the misery?—how find strength to walk on amid the darkness,—he, to whom suffering was so new, so inconceivable?

Towards sunset he strolled down to the station; it was time for the train which ought to bring Joe Grimshaw and his lug-

gage, but the express by which he meant to go on to New York would not arrive for a couple of hours yet. He should have a letter from Georgia,—news of Phillis French; but to what avail? Fool that he was to think of her!—she had deceived him from first to last. She was another man's wife,—no other solution of this mystery was possible,—the wife of a wretch so vile that he had been forced to hide from the arm of the law. Poor, miserable Phillis! A sudden reaction of feeling filled him with pity for her. She must have married this creature when so young, and paid such a terrible penalty for her folly, since it was evident that she had left him,—had even concealed the fact of her marriage.

Neither Georgia nor Denis could know: they would have told him. No, Phillis had carefully guarded her secret, but she had broken his heart thereby. Ah, she might have trusted him,—it was her duty when she saw that he loved her,—might have warned him before his soul had so wholly gone out towards her that the loss of his dream must wreck his entire future.

The train arrived; Joe Grimshaw did not appear, but Maurice saw his aunt and Mr. Caruthers descend, and, moving forward, had the pleasure of assisting to carry Mrs. Mayford into the station.

The widow was too tired, and the others were too wretched, to be capable of surprise at this unexpected meeting.

"Where is Georgia?" Maurice asked.

"Not now; I can answer no questions now," Aunt Conyngnam exclaimed, in a tragic voice. "Wait till we are at the hotel."

"Georgia couldn't make up her mind to leave her friends," sneered Sibyl Mayford, affecting to lower her voice for Maurice's special benefit.

Mrs. Conyngnam turned sharply on the venomous little reptile.

"I wish you would be quiet, Sibyl," said she. "As you know nothing whatever about the matter, you had better leave me to explain."

The widow saw by the expression of Mr. Caruthers's face that he highly relished the rebuke she had received, and it was slight wonder, for she had tormented both her companions beyond measure during the journey.

Mrs. Mayford immediately buried her face in her handkerchief and appeared dumb from wounded feeling, but nobody noticed or cared. At heart she was glad and exultant; while pretending to sleep, she had understood enough of the conversation held by Mrs. Conyngham and Mr. Caruthers to be convinced that there had been more between Georgia and that gentleman than she had dreamed; but it was all over; she gleaned this information too. Georgia would marry Denis Bourke, and ruin her own life; and Mr. Caruthers was left free. And here came Maurice, looking so wretched—half mad, in fact—that she could feel satisfied with the revenge she had gained. Altogether, the widow had consolations enough to compensate for Mrs. Conyngham's stern reproof, though she would have responded by bitter tongue-thrusts, instead of taking refuge in wounded sensibility, had she not feared to disgust Mr. Caruthers by such a display.

When they reached the hotel, a strenuous effort was made by her two long-suffering friends to persuade the invalid to go to bed at once; but she persisted in lying down on a sofa in the sitting-room provided for them, and vowed she would eat no dinner unless the rest of the party dined with her there.

Mrs. Conyngham felt too thoroughly dispirited for a combat; besides, she was eager to pour her woes into Maurice's ears, so she took him to her chamber, under a pretence that Sibyl must at least rest a little; and on the same plea Mr. Caruthers hurried off, in spite of her protestations that she was not tired,—that she needed society instead of the solitude to which they were so heartlessly condemning her.

Maurice received his aunt's news with an apathy that proved the crowning blow to her angry despair and drove her nearly frantic.

"You are content to see your sister marry that beggar!" she cried. "Are you utterly without any common feeling?"

"Oh, Bourke is not a beggar," returned Maurice, wearily. "There are a great many things you do not understand. I can't explain. Don't worry yourself: there is no need."

"No need!" she repeated.

"Well, no use, at least. Georgia will do as she pleases."

"It is your duty to return and bring her here," cried Aunt Conyngham. "That house is no place for her; that girl, Phillis French, not fit society for her."

"A better woman never lived!" cried Maurice, angrily: "you must not speak a word against her."

"If I could only get Georgia away, I should never want to talk or think of her," returned his aunt. "Oh, Maurice, Maurice, for pity's sake, for all our sakes, go back and persuade her to listen to reason, to—"

"Go back! I would not do it to save your soul and mine," interrupted Maurice, savagely. Then he checked himself, and added, more quietly, "I shall not meddle in Georgia's affairs; she knows what she wants; she must make her own choice."

"She is mad, and so are you," cried Aunt Conyngham, fairly wringing her hands, for once in her life so moved beyond self-control that she gave way to a melodramatic outburst of wrathful grief, such as no human being ever before saw her display or would have believed her capable of. She sobbed and wept, abused Georgia, upbraided her nephew, and in the same breath pleaded with him in frantic terms to save his sister.

Maurice's senses were so dulled by suffering that he could only sit and watch her in a kind of stupefied wonder, vaguely touched by her distress, and yet all the while so lost in his own misery that he did not even remember to offer such poor crumbs of comfort as he might, without breaking his promise to Bourke, have bestowed upon the disappointed woman, smitten by the direst blow which fate could ever deal,—wounded mortally in her vanity and her pride.

"I wish you wouldn't make such a noise!" he sighed, drearily. "You put everything out of my head. It seems as if there was something I wanted to tell you; but I can't remember what it was."

Mrs. Conyngham ceased her lamentations, and sat staring at him in troubled astonishment; his apathetic quiet disturbed her more than any show of emotion could have done, it was so unlike his impulsive nature, which generally, either in anger or in grief, was dramatically demonstrative. She had been so absorbed by her bitter disappointment, and the hope of inducing him to use his influence with Georgia, that she had scarcely noticed his looks: they startled and alarmed her, now that she did observe them.

His face was ghastly with a yellowish pallor like that of a corpse; the cheeks were shrunken, the forehead knotted and

corrugated with pain, the veins standing out on it like whip-cords, and the great black eyes blazing with a sombre light.

"Oh, Maurice, you are ill!" she cried. "You must go to bed! You ought to see a doctor at once."

"What a ridiculous old auntie you are!" he answered, with a burst of mirthless laughter, which made her shiver. "I never was better in my life! I shall go on to town by the next train; that stupid Joe Grimshaw hasn't brought my luggage yet, but it is no matter."

"Oh, wait for us! wait till to-morrow!" pleaded Mrs. Conyngham. "Indeed, you are not fit to travel! Oh, my poor boy, something dreadful has happened, I know. You have found out that miserable girl; there is some awful secret about the man she is hiding. I am sure Mr. Caruthers has discovered too—"

"If Caruthers opens his lips, I'll choke the life out of him!" broke in Maurice.

"You know he would not: he is always kind,—always generous," replied Mrs. Conyngham. "Oh, that crazy Georgia, to reject such a man! And now you make me so anxious! I declare, I shall go mad between you!"

"I wouldn't: it's not worth while," said Maurice, sinking back into the unnatural composure, which seemed the more strange from its contrast to that momentary burst of passion. "I say, it's no good to talk. Let me go away. I'm tired."

"Do stay! please stay!" cried his aunt. "I'll not speak a word that can annoy you; I won't even talk about Georgia any more now. Don't go, Maurice! don't go!"

He had risen, and was moving towards the door. She hurried after him, and laid her clasped hands on his arm. Even while pleading so earnestly, so full of anxiety, she was conscious of vaguely wondering if it could be really she conducting herself in this stagey fashion.

"Well, well, I'll stop," he said, just to end her frantic expostulations.

Some one knocked at the door.

"Who is it? what do you want? You can't come in!" called Mrs. Conyngham.

Rosalie's voice gave answer that dinner was waiting; Mrs. Mayford felt quite faint, and begged there might be no further delay.

"I wish Mrs. Mayford was dead!" exclaimed Aunt Conyng-ham.

Maurice broke into that dreadful laugh again. The dismal sound, and the violence of her own ejaculation, did a great deal to restore his aunt to her senses. She was frightened about him, and ashamed of herself. There must be an end of dramatic scenes: she might be wretched, but she need not be undignified.

"You will dine with us, Maurice," she said. "Go into the sitting-room. I will come in a few moments."

Maurice, too weary to argue, went back to the chamber where Sibyl Mayford was persecuting poor Mr. Caruthers, who had unluckily returned, expecting to find Mrs. Conyng-ham and Peyton there.

"Dear me, Maurice, how ill you look!" cried the widow, as he entered. "So do Mr. Caruthers and your aunt, for that matter. What on earth has happened to you all?"

"Sibyl, my dear," said Maurice, with a ghastly attempt at the careless, bantering manner in which he usually treated her, "you are in a mood to torment and scratch, I see,—reminiscences of some former stage of existence, doubtless,—but you know of old that you can't tease me, though you may Caruthers and the aunt."

"Maurice Peyton, you are the rudest man alive!" exclaimed the widow, angrily.

"Thanks, my beloved friend," said he.

Mr. Caruthers was standing with his back to the chimney, resting his arm on the mantel. Sibyl saw a half-amused, half-contemptuous smile cross his worn, tired features, which seemed positively to have aged since the morning: the contempt was for her, the widow knew, and it roused her into one of her small cat-like furies.

"It's like sitting at a play to watch you all," sneered she. "Cousin, you are tragic, and Maurice is melodramatic. What a pity neither Georgia nor Phillis French is here to enjoy it! But I suppose, between the fascinations of Mr. Bourke and that mysterious stranger they are hiding,—such a respectable thing to do!—they have no time to regret your loss."

"Excuse me, Mrs. Mayford," said Mr. Caruthers; "I think you forget that you are speaking to Miss Grosvenor's brother. Besides, I am at a loss to understand on what

grounds you base your assertion that Mr. Bourke's visitor is in hiding."

"Perhaps I know more than you think!" cried she.

"You told us that you did not hear a word of the conversation last night: so how can you know?" he asked, eying her sternly.

She colored violently under his glance, but said, spitefully,—

"My dear cousin, pray do not imitate Maurice's rudeness: one may excuse him, because he will be only a silly boy if he should live to a hundred."

Unfortunately for her, Mrs. Conyngham entered while she was speaking. The stately lady had recovered her self-control; she meant to make no more scenes, and to permit none. She went up to the sofa where Mrs. Mayford was lying, bent over her, and said, in a low tone,—

"If you are guilty of a single impoliteness more,—if you throw out so much as a hint upon any subject which can be unpleasant to either of us,—I shall start for New York to-night and leave you here alone. No, you need not cry," she added, as Sibyl gave a premonitory sob. "Unless you can be perfectly calm, and conduct yourself properly, we shall allow you to dine in solitude."

Aunt Conyngham, firm in her restored composure, was not to be trifled with; the widow knew she must go no further.

"Are we ever to have any dinner?" she asked, fretfully.

"Please ring the bell, Maurice, and tell them to serve us at once: we are all tired, and poor Sibyl needs nourishment," said Aunt Conyngham, in her most mellifluous voice and her best manner.

The dinner passed pleasantly enough; Maurice suddenly began to talk in a reckless, nonsensical way, which was a sort of caricature of his ordinary light-hearted style, and though Mrs. Conyngham was troubled thereby, and perceived that Caruthers shared her anxiety, they both endeavored to appear at ease, and the widow, always going from one extreme to the other,—too selfish to notice or care about anybody else,—waxed very sweet, and decided she must by her amiability cause Mr. Caruthers to forget Georgia,—a fate which her insatiable vanity positively convinced her she could accomplish.

Aunt Conyngham could not bear to lose sight of Maurice for an instant; she begged the two gentlemen to smoke where they were, instead of going down-stairs, and Mr. Caruthers, comprehending by her significant glance what her motive was, at once consented, and the widow, by way of putting the finishing touches to her fascinations, insisted on lighting "Cousin Herbert's" cigarette, putting it to her painted lips as she did so.

He thanked her with ceremonious courtesy, but as he took it from her hand he crossed the room, and Mrs. Conyngham saw him fling the cigarette away, but he stood so that the fair Sibyl could not see him, and when he returned he was smoking.

About nine o'clock Rosalie appeared to say that Joe Grimshaw had arrived, and wanted to speak with Mr. Peyton.

"Tell him to come up," Mrs. Conyngham said, and the boy soon entered, to have the pleasure of hearing the widow in an audible aside to Mr. Caruthers pronounce him "such an uncouth little monster that he was actually picturesque." But her witticism received no attention from the gentleman, and Joe was much too sensible to be hurt, though he took his revenge, unnoticed by the others; he made her a bow so profound that it became an impertinence, for which she longed to box his ears.

"So you have got here at last, Joe," said Peyton. "I suppose you have brought all my luggage?"

"Yes, sir; everything's put up proper," Joe replied. "I left the trunks to the depot, 'cause I thought you wouldn't want 'em. I missed the express, and had to come by a freight train; that's what makes me so late."

"It is of no consequence. You saw Miss Grosvenor?"

"Yes, sir. She sent her best love, and told me to tell you she would write to you to-morrow to N'York."

"Thanks. Ask the hotel people to give you some supper and a bed; to-morrow morning you must ride my horse back," Maurice said, longing, hungering for news of Phillis, yet resolute not to ask a question,—enraged beyond endurance, too, with his own contemptible weakness for wishing to do so.

Joe was about to speak, putting his hand in the breast-pocket of his jacket at the same instant; but Sibyl Mayford, watching with huge ecstasy the misery in Peyton's face, could

not resist her desire to say something that would be disagreeable, and she interrupted,—

“You must be that wonderful Joe Grimshaw I have heard them all talk about so often.”

“Yes’m,” said he. “I didn’t know I wuz very wonderful; anyhow, I’m Joe Grimshaw, sartin.”

“Has Mr. Bourke’s visitor gone away?” she asked.

“No, ma’am; he’s been took very sick,” replied Joe, supposing that, since she knew of the guest’s presence in Bourke’s house, the embargo of secrecy which had been laid on him did not apply to her. “That’s the reason Miss Georgia couldn’t write, Mr. Peyton; they’re all three busy. I’ve got a telegram fur Mr. Caruthers,” he continued, drawing his hand out of his pocket, with a yellow envelope therein. “It came after he went away, and the hotel folks sent it over to Mr. Bourke’s jest as I was a-startin’, and Miss Gros-ve-nor told me to fetch it.”

Mr. Caruthers took the despatch, opened it, stared round in wonder, then exclaimed,—

“In heaven’s name, what can this mean?”

Joe Grimshaw chanced to be looking at Mrs. Mayford; he saw her begin to shake from head to foot like a person in an ague; then she lay back on her pillows, and covered her face with her hand.

Maurice snatched the paper Caruthers mechanically extended towards him, and, forgetful of Joe Grimshaw’s presence, of Sibyl Mayford’s too, read the telegram half aloud,—

“Your message received: trusty man who knows will be there early in the morning.”

The telegram was signed by a person who Maurice knew was the chief of the Philadelphia police.

“My God!” he cried. “Caruthers, you ought to be shot! —you have betrayed that poor wretch!”

“You know I am incapable of it,” returned Mr. Caruthers. “I sent no telegram. Who can have used my name?”

His glance happened to fall on Joe Grimshaw, and he made a sign to Maurice to remind him of the boy’s presence.

“Go out, Joe,” said Peyton; “and, remember, not a word!”

“No, sir!” cried Joe, eagerly. “It was the lady there sent the telegram.”

"What!—Mrs. Mayford?" Mr. Caruthers and Peyton exclaimed together, while Mrs. Conyngham uttered a cry of angry wonder, and the miserable culprit cowered lower among her pillows, then lifted her head to sob,—

"You little wretch! how dare you say such a thing?"

"'Cause you did, ma'am," returned Joe, stoutly.

"You sent a telegram in my name?" demanded Mr. Caruthers, turning upon the woman with a face so changed by anger that it hardly seemed his. "You dared to do it?"

"Cousin, cousin, don't believe it! he lies!" she shrieked.

"No, ma'am; 'tain't me that's a-lyin'," Joe replied, with emphasis.

"Tell us what you know about it, Joe," said Maurice.

"I was down to the depot, Mr. Peyton, when they all three got there," said Joe, composedly. "Fust your aunt she drove off to Miss French's; then arter a while Mrs. Mayford she got fidgety, and said she knowed they'd miss the train, and made Mr. Caruthers go to the house. Jist as soon as he wuz gone, she sent Injin Joe for the telegram-man; and when he come, she said, 'Here's a despatch my cousin, Mr. Caruthers, wants sent to oncet.' Old Hummins he tuk it and read it out. I was a-standin' outside the door, and I heerd, though I warn't a-meanin' to listen: whatever I be, I ain't mean, Mr. Peyton."

"No, no!" cried Maurice. "What did the despatch say, Joe?"

"Henry Osborne is here—send at once," Joe replied, slowly, as if reading the words. "That was it, letter for letter, and I wondered who on earth Henry Osborne could be; not having an idea it was Mr. Bourke's visitor, else I'd ha' told him; but I thought his name was Ransom."

Mrs. Mayford lay speechless, trying vainly to articulate, though knowing that denial was useless. She had signed Mr. Caruthers's name to the despatch, because aware that would cause the chief of police to give it instant attention, and, as Mr. Caruthers seldom went to Philadelphia, she had been confident he would not discover what she had done.

For the first time in their experience of him, his friends saw Mr. Caruthers roused to a pitch of ungovernable wrath. He strode up to the sofa, and said, in a voice like iron,—

"If that man is arrested, I will prosecute you for having

made an illegal use of my name! Now speak! tell the truth, too!"

Sibyl Mayford only answered by a frightened groan. Mrs. Conyngham called out,—

"Do you hear, Sibyl? Oh, Mr. Caruthers, send the boy away!"

"Let him stop!" returned Mr. Caruthers. "It is probable that Mrs. Mayford will have to speak in a place where speaking will be more difficult: she may as well grow accustomed to hearing her own voice proclaim her wickedness and her shame."

"Oh, my God, my God, why can't I die?" moaned the wretched creature.

"As soon as you please, after you have confessed," her pitiless judge made answer; "but do that first."

"Mr. Caruthers, Mr. Caruthers!" cried Mrs. Conyngham. "Oh, be merciful!"

"When she shows that she has any claim thereto, by offering full confession of her guilt," he replied, still in that iron voice. "Mrs. Mayford, you listened while I was talking to Miss French: you could have found out in no other way! Don't waste time: speak!"

"Yes, I did," she moaned; "I sent the telegram! Oh, don't have me punished! If you don't promise, I'll kill myself—I will!"

"So slight a threat could not influence me," he replied: "such an act would be the one service you could render all who have the misfortune to be connected with you. If there is time to save that man, you go free; if not, you meet your punishment. Maurice, come; we must telegraph."

"The message wouldn't be delivered till too late," Peyton said, rousing himself; "besides, it would only inculcate Bourke uselessly. No, I must go; if there's no train, I'll find a horse; mine is not fit."

"There'll be a train as far as Toby's Mills in a couple of hours," cried Joe Grimshaw; "there you can get a horse, Mr. Peyton."

Sibyl Mayford was shrieking in violent hysterics, tearing wildly at her hair, so mad with shame and fear that for the time she was actually a lunatic.

"Go out, go out. Send Rosalie!" ordered Mrs. Conyngham. "Maurice, you will see me before you start?"

"Yes, yes! Do you want a doctor for that woman?"

"No; he could do no good: she must scream herself quiet. Tell Rosalie to come. If the people hear the noise, say it is only a fit of hysterics."

The two gentlemen hurried away, followed by Joe Grimshaw, and Mrs. Conyngham was left to her task of quieting the miserable creature, the sight of whom filled her with a sensation sharper than contempt: her own remorse had begun. Phillis French had warned her that the unworthy threat she had uttered would, sooner or later, become the most humiliating recollection of her life. The prophecy was fulfilled already! She had been an arrogant woman, a hard woman, but always proud and honorable: that menace to Phillis was the one mean action she had ever committed, and she felt its unworthiness with terrible force as she looked at the frightened sufferer before her, and knew that, much as she despised her, she must despise herself still more.

CHAPTER XLI.

WHEN the carriage which bore her aunt and Mr. Caruthers away had disappeared, Georgia sunk down on a bench, and covered her face with her hands. She realized what she had done; she was not frightened, not sorry, but a strange awe filled her soul. She had voluntarily cut herself loose from every mooring of her old life: the new existence had begun.

She was left for some moments to complete silence; presently she called, without lifting her head,—

"I am not crying, Phil; indeed, I am not."

Then she heard Denis's voice say, softly and tenderly,—

"Georgia, Georgia!"

She looked up. Phillis had disappeared. Bourke stood gazing at her with his whole soul in his eyes.

"I—I didn't hear Phil go," she said, while a sudden shyness sent a wave of brilliant color across her cheeks, and the half-pleading, half-wistful expression and attitude softened her

stately beauty into such perfection that Denis marvelled thereat.

"Come into the garden for a little," he said, presently, offering her his arm.

She took it without a word; he felt her hand tremble, and he was no less agitated himself. His bronzed face had paled, and his eyes shone with an intense, eager light. They walked on till they reached the arbor; as they sat down, Bourke drew a long, deep breath of content.

"I hardly dare believe that it is real!" he exclaimed, gently taking her two hands in his. "The dear hands, the beautiful hands! mine to hold!—mine to keep! Say it once, Georgia,—just once!"

"Yours if you will," she answered, tremulously, though without hesitation.

"My darling! my darling!" he murmured, pressing his lips on the delicate rose-tinted palms. "My brave, noble Georgia!"

"You must be good to me?" she said, pleadingly.

"Indeed, indeed I will."

"You must be patient with me, I mean," she continued, her girlish embarrassment lost in womanly earnestness. "I don't know this Georgia: she is a new creature to me."

"But you are not afraid!" he cried. "Ah, Georgia, can't you tell me that you are glad?—that you are happy?"

"I am glad! I am happy!" she answered. "I feel—oh, I can't express it—as if I had been battling against a tempest, and suddenly found myself in a haven of peace and rest. But if I have done wrong,—if—"

"Georgia, Georgia, don't say that. There must be no fears, no doubts now."

"I do not mean wrong towards myself," she replied, "but to you."

"You have made me the proudest and happiest man alive," he exclaimed. "This very happiness shows me how black and lasting the night would have been if I had lost you. I never dared to think—oh, I knew the world would not conquer."

"No," she said, "you and Phillis had taught me too much for that to be possible. But when I reflect how useless I am—when I think that I may be a drag upon you! Please,

please don't think I am speaking selfishly. I am not afraid for myself, indeed I am not."

"God bless you for these words!" he cried. "Georgia, you have done right; your heart and soul tell you so. This last hour was the crisis; the turning-point was reached."

"I knew that; I felt it," she replied. "Yet up to the end I did not mean to yield. Oh, the words seemed to utter themselves in spite of me."

"But you were glad, glad! Ah, say it once more,—just once!"

She looked full in his face with a beautiful smile.

"I can only repeat what I said. It seems as if I had suddenly been brought out of the tempest into a land where it is always afternoon," she murmured. "Yet it seems selfish to be happy. Oh, I am so grieved to have my aunt angry! I love her,—I did not know how much, until I saw her go away without even bidding me good-by!"

"She will forgive you at length," he replied, with an odd smile.

"I don't know. She can be very stern and hard. And, oh,—don't be vexed,—poor Mr. Caruthers!—he is so good! Much as I respected him, I never half appreciated his worth till that last moment."

"He is one of the noblest men living," cried Denis. "Nobody who was not a real hero could have behaved as he did. But you cannot reproach yourself: you were honest from first to last. I don't know how, Georgia, but there will be some compensation for him. He won't be allowed to suffer long: he is too noble and upright for that to be permitted."

"Indeed, it seems as if it must be so. I must think that; only I am afraid it is only a selfish excuse to put his pain out of my mind."

"No, it is not! See, Georgia, you must not let your conscience grow morbidly sensitive. We are all given to that when we are very earnest to do right. It is a mistake. The feeling often makes people do wrong, women especially. How often they marry men just because to refuse would cause temporary suffering, and so commit an injury that is lasting!"

"Ah! you see that is just what I am afraid of,—that I have done you a wrong," she replied, trying to speak playfully, but the sentence ended in a sudden rush of tears.

"No, no; because you love me!" he cried. "Georgia, Georgia, have done with that fear now and forever! It is the only wrong you could do yourself or me: it is a wrong to our love, and God sent us that, so it must be a gift we are to guard preciously."

"I have done with it," she said, wiping away her tears; "I will never think it again—I promise you."

He caught her in his arms; their lips met in the first ecstatic kiss of love and happiness. For a few moments she leaned her head passively against his breast, while he murmured half-intelligible words of tenderness and blessed promises for the future, which she understood with her heart rather than her outward ears. After a little she lifted her head, though she did not try to withdraw herself from the shelter of his embrace; it gave her a sense of repose and safety; she had reached her haven at last.

"Oh, poor Phillis, poor Maurice!" she sighed, the very fulness of her own content rousing a bitter pang of sympathy as she contrasted their suffering therewith. "It does seem wicked to be so happy when they are miserable."

"My child, everything will end well for them; be sure of that!" cried Bourke. "I never dreamed until lately what Maurice has in him; he never really knew his own nature, any more than you did yours. You will see. We must write to him—he must hear the whole. You will see!"

"You are always so determined an optimist," she said, smiling. "But I like to believe you; it is such a comfort. If I can see them happy,—see him, you know, and if the poor aunt could only learn to be reasonably satisfied."

Denis's eyes began to laugh, but he said, gravely,—

"At least you are so. You are not afraid of being poor; you don't call my aims mad, or even impracticable, any longer!"

"I think they are the grandest that a man ever had!" she cried. "I'm not half good enough to share them; but to do whatever I can to help, I shall hold the highest work that could have been given me. I owe you this; I ought to say it; I was convinced long ago."

"Thank God!" he ejaculated.

"But you must have patience; you must teach me," she continued. "I shall make dreadful blunders; you know my

idle, extravagant habits ; but I'll try, and Phillis will help; she will show me how to be economical and wise. I am sure I can learn, though my aunt would not believe it, or Maurice either. Oh, I must go and write to them. I can't bear to have her angry with me. I must convince her that at least I have done what is for my happiness."

Bourke laughed outright. She looked up wonderingly.

"She shall be appeased," he said. "Georgia, you may write to her that the mendicant won't always keep you a prisoner in his old farm-house."

"Ah! now you are beginning to think about making a fortune. You don't trust me, after all. You mean to let me be a drag and weight,—to give up your great work in order to make my life smooth," she cried, reproachfully. "I won't have it! I don't want to be rich."

"I'm afraid you must be one day," he said; "however, it may not come for a good while yet: you will have plenty of time to practise living on limited means. Only, just to console the aunt, you may tell her that the next time she goes to Europe she can visit one of the finest castles and largest estates in Ireland, and enjoy the idea that it will some day belong to you and me."

"Oh, you have cheated me all along!" she cried, in a sort of dismayed wonder, which made him laugh again. "I should have been glad a few weeks ago; now I am sorry! Oh, I thought I was going to prove good for something—for your sake!"

"You have proved that you are capable of the greatest thing of all—the being true to your own soul!" he answered, in a voice at once earnest and proudly exultant. "No change in my prospects can ever change my plans, Georgia: increased means may widen my duty, but cannot alter it. That was why I kept silence. Unless you could share that duty, believe in it, enjoy it, much as I loved you, I could not ask you to share my life. It was the aim and the work you had to accept. Whether I am a Pennsylvania farmer, or the owner of great estates, the principle which actuates me must be the same."

"Yes; I begin to understand," she said. "But I wish you had not told me yet."

"I might have waited, just to give myself the pleasure of but how beautifully you would behave; but it would seem

cruel not to set poor Mrs. Conyngham's mind at rest," he said: "and when you add that sometimes you could have the sweet privilege, if you chose to exercise it, of being addressed as 'My Lady,' I fancy she will be tolerably content."

"Oh," Georgia quite groaned, "this is too much! I think I never will forgive you, Denis Bourke."

"Console yourself," he replied: "the title is an ornament I have no intention of ever wearing. If the uncle chooses, he can leave a good deal of his money away from me. Phillis told you why he was angry and sent me off?"

"Oh, yes; and you did right,—right!" she cried, with proudly-flashing eyes.

"In that case," he continued, after pausing to kiss her hand, by way of thanking her for her exultant praise, "I should have to count my shekels almost as carefully as I do now, in order not to risk cramping my ability to be of use. There, it is all said. Time enough to think of the future when it comes. What we have to do is to be happy and useful in the present, my noble, grand-hearted woman."

"But you would have let me go without speaking," she exclaimed; and, though the words implied a reproach, her voice showed that they meant admiration and reverence for the steadfastness of purpose, the strength of soul which would have enabled him to put duty even before his love.

"Yes, Georgia. We could only have been miserable together unless you accepted my aims: that had to be! It would have broken my heart to give you up; but, Georgia, there is one thing higher than love,—the doing right, being true to our souls! Not for a reward in another existence, but to help to the full extent of our power, be it little or great, be the field of action obscure or prominent, the carrying on of the noblest work life offers; the uplifting of the human race; the progress of the world towards light; the fulfilment of the creed which Christ taught; the reign of peace—that is wisdom! It will come at length, through the highest cultivation of all human faculties; through the recognition of the truth that in the endless sweep of infinitude there can be no break, nothing unimportant, every thing and creature deathless; development the law, by learning and following which what men call sin shall fade, and God become all in all, since his creation must be a portion of God himself."

His eyes shone with a strange, far-seeking light; his face was grand with something beyond enthusiasm,—with the certainty of truth, the one truth which alone stands out clear amid the impenetrable mystery that wraps mortal existence; which slowly, surely, shall at last shine so plain that all men will comprehend the meaning of the glorious sentence that has rung its anthem of hope and joy down through the mists of ages,—“*God looked upon his work and said, ‘It is good.’*”

Georgia sat gazing up at the speaker, with a countenance elevated and illuminated like his own. When he paused, she leaned her forehead on the hand he stretched towards her, and murmured, with her whole heart in her voice,—

“And I thank God for my priceless gift,—your love!”

The last glory of the sunset had faded—twilight had gathered about them unaware—when they were interrupted by old Patrick’s approach.

“Come quick, Misther Denis!” he exclaimed. “The gentleman’s took worse: he wants Miss Phaylis! Come quick, for there’s death in his face: I’ve seen it too often not to know the signs.”

They hurried back to the house. Georgia called Phillis out of grandma’s room, and they told her the news as gently as they could. She was terribly shaken, but did not lose her self-control; she explained to the old lady that she was obliged to go to some sick person, and might not be back till late, and grandma, still under the influence of the opiates she had taken, scarcely asked a question.

Phillis and Bourke hastened off, and Georgia remained with grandma, who seemed placidly glad, but not surprised, that her favorite had decided to remain longer at the Nest. She fell asleep at length, and then Georgia went herself towards Bourke’s house. Denis met her near the lake.

“Patrick was right,” he said: “the man is dying.”

“Oh, poor Phil!” cried Georgia.

“Yes, but she bears it well. After all, dear, it is a blessing,” Denis answered.

“But you must have a doctor—”

“Old Barlow drove by just as we got to the house: I knew I could trust him. But, indeed, silence is unimportant: it will be all over by daylight. He has been suffering for years

from heart-disease: he must have had wonderful vitality to last so long."

Dinner was waiting, and they tried to eat; after a while, Phillis came down for a few moments, and drank a cup of tea and took some nourishment; then they all went up-stairs.

The dying man was conscious, and could talk; he wanted to be alone with Phillis, so Georgia and Bourke sat in the next chamber, Denis going now and then into the sick-room to help to move the sufferer on his pillows, or to aid Phillis when a paroxysm of pain seized him.

Their watch lasted till daylight. As dawn broke, Georgia opened the window and leaned out over the sill. The sound of a horse's feet rang up through the stillness. Her first thought was a quick dread that the fugitive had been traced: at least it was too late; he was rapidly passing beyond the reach of human justice.

Bourke entered as she turned away from the casement. She told him what she had heard; and he was about to go down-stairs and discover if her fears were correct, when the door opened, and Peyton appeared.

"You must get that man away," he said, rapidly. "The officers will come by the first train: thank God I have got here in time! Patrick says he is ill; but you must hide him; if you do not, he will be arrested!"

Phillis came in while he was speaking; he did not see her till she said, quietly,—

"There is nothing to fear. My father is dead."

Maurice staggered against the wall, and they heard him mutter,—

"My God! I thought he was her husband!"

When Peyton could speak and hear after the first dizzying rush of emotion had passed, Phillis had gone out as noiselessly as she entered, and Georgia had followed her.

Bourke summoned Tabitha and old Patrick, and, while they were busy in the dead man's room, he told Maurice the whole of Phillis French's story.

Shortly after Mrs. Granger's death, Phillis learned that her father was alive,—received an eager appeal for assistance, which she could not for an instant hesitate to grant. He had escaped from the shipwreck in which he was supposed to have perished, had been living since that time in Mexico and New

Orleans, and was about to be brought to justice in the latter city under the assumed name which concealed his identity.

Mrs. Granger had left Phillis sixty thousand dollars; she went at once to New Orleans, secured the two most famous criminal lawyers in the State as his defenders, and he evaded punishment.

She owned the farm in Pennsylvania, and took her grandmother there to live. The fund left her after the enormous expenses to which she had been subjected was used for her father's benefit, though she wisely persisted in merely sending the annual income to him in his Australian refuge.

Bourke had been in New Orleans at the time of the trial; he knew French,—had, indeed, narrowly avoided losing a considerable sum through his means,—and Denis's sympathy and counsel were Phillis's support during that terrible period, and had been her comfort and guide ever since.

When Phillis reached her new home she found the adjoining place for sale, and, knowing that Bourke proposed to buy a farm, she wrote to him, and in a few weeks he became her neighbor. Her correspondence with her father always passed through his hands, in order that no suspicion might ever be roused in her grandmother's mind, and his advice had helped her to hold firm to her resolve about the money, in spite of her father's pleadings and reproaches.

French wanted to get possession of the capital by specious assurances of the fortune it would enable him to make for them both, frequently menacing her with a return to America if she did not consent. It was this threat which had caused the excitement in Phillis that several times so sorely puzzled Georgia during the first weeks of her stay at the Nest.

Later, Phillis lived for a season in a constant agony of suspense, aware that her father had carried out his resolution of leaving Australia, though unaware then of the reasons which had obliged him to flee.

Bourke had not supposed the man would venture to come east of California; he had at length promised not to do so, and for a little while Phillis had rested on this hope. But French, secure in his disguise, believed that he might with impunity go on to the Atlantic coast, and that her fears for his safety would induce Phillis to yield to his demands and

enable him to sail for Europe possessed of funds sufficient to carry out his plan of realizing a fortune, based on an insane faith in some marvellous theory, the practical illustration whereof was certain to break the bank of every gaming-establishment on the Continent.

As Bourke ended the explanations which rendered clear the character of the heroic girl,—her patience, her fortitude, the positive grandeur with which she had supported her dismal burden,—Phillis and Georgia entered, supposing that the two men had gone down-stairs.

Maurice went quickly up to Phillis, bent on his knees before her, and pressed his lips to the hem of her gown.

"You are the bravest woman God ever made!" he said, in a broken voice, then rose and left the room without another word.

CHAPTER XLII.

NEARLY two years had gone by since Phillis's father was laid in his grave. The secret of his relationship to her had been easily kept; even grandma did not know that the fugitive criminal who died under Bourke's roof was her son-in-law; she supposed, as others did, that he had sought shelter there, a complete stranger, and that, finding him ill, Bourke had taken him in without a question,—an act too much in keeping with his ordinary conduct to surprise anybody.

Old Mr. Travers died a few months later; and, as his heirs did not want the farm, Phillis had no difficulty in securing it. Grandma Davis passed painlessly away about a year after the close of the unsuspected tragedy in her grand-daughter's life, happy to the last, having no wish ungratified, since she left Georgia and Bourke near her darling.

The pair had been married almost immediately,—married, too, from Aunt Conyngham's house; and that lady even forgot her sympathy for Mr. Caruthers in her satisfaction at Georgia's prospects, which, in her mind, included an acceptance on Denis's part of the title; but her niece knew better.

Georgia and Bourke did not forget their friend, and the one shadow on their happiness was removed a little while

before the second anniversary of their wedding-day. Mr. Caruthers wrote to tell them that he was about to be married. Sibyl Mayford bore the tidings with tolerable composure, for she had known that her cousin was lost to her, and she could have no vengeance whatever,—not even the pleasure of so much as uttering a whisper against Phillis French; for it was upon this condition alone that Mr. Caruthers allowed her evil action to remain unnoticed.

It was the close of a gorgeous summer day; Phillis was seated in the garden. She had just sent Ann Raines away, and with her Joe Grimshaw, who had entered her service and was growing rapidly into a tall, energetic young man.

She had given all her orders for the next morning, and could now indulge in an hour's quiet,—of dreams even, for she had learned to allow herself that luxury. She had not seen Maurice Peyton since the morning of her father's death: he had gone away without other farewell than those admiring words uttered when he knelt at her feet in reverential homage. He was in Europe, studying art as diligently as if he had been a poor man, and within the last few weeks pleasant wafts of praise, an earnest of what the future might bring, had greeted him from the exhibition of his pictures.

He was coming home now; before winter he would arrive, and it was of this arrival that Phillis dreamed, as she sat there in the soft twilight. He had never once written to her of his love or his hopes; but she knew that it was for her he was coming.

She was roused by the sound of footsteps on the shorn turf, and, without turning her head, called, gayly,—

"Denis, what makes you so late? I have been expecting you for the last half-hour. Bring Georgia out here: it is too pleasant to stop in-doors."

There was no answer. She looked round. Maurice Peyton stood there, holding out his hands in eager supplication. Before she could move, he was at her feet again, crying,—

"I have tried to grow worthier of you; I have tried! I would not come back till I had shown that at least I meant to do that! Phillis, Phillis, will you give me happiness and honor beyond my deserts? Can you learn to love me?"

And she smiled down at him, saying, softly,—

"I do not need to learn: I did it from the first."

The sunset faded. The moon rose, round and full, flooding the garden with silver light. Through the perfumed distance came Georgia and Bourke, unable to control their eagerness any longer; and their loving words of congratulation helped Phillis and Maurice the more fully to realize that never in this world could there be any dividing for them in the new path they had entered.

THE END.



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